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## Projectification

### The Trojan horse of local government

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# Projectification

The Trojan horse of local government

MATS FRED, LUND UNIVERSITY & MALMÖ UNIVERSITY



## Projectification



# Projectification

The Trojan horse of local government

Mats Fred



DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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| Abstract<br><br>This thesis aims to conceptualize local government projectification by answering the questions of how projectification is manifested in practice, and what the consequences of the project logic are for local government organizations and their employees. An institutional ethnography is conducted in the Swedish municipality of Eslöv and its organizational and institutional surroundings. Through an institutional logic perspective informed by translation theory, local government projectification is conceptualized as a process of proliferation, transformation and adaptation, as well as organizational capacity building. Projectification as proliferation emphasizes the increasing use and diffusion of projects and project ideas. Projectification as transformation and adaptation highlights processes of transformation of "permanent" ordinary organizational activities to temporary projects, and adaptation in the surrounding organizations and structures. Projectification as organizational capacity building implies that the project logic diffuses in local government organizations, not primarily through specific projects, but through practices encouraging the project logic, which reinforces the organizational project capacity of local government. Three conclusions are drawn. First, projectification must be regarded as something more than many projects. Second, projects are not "just" vehicles carrying something forward, but techniques, tools and practices that produce specific effects of their own, independently of their stated objectives or aims ascribed to them. Third, the practical outcome of the project logic is more related to the rational and technical aspects of the project as a form than the innovative and flexible aspects of the project as a process. Hence, local government bureaucracy appears to be battle bureaucracy with more bureaucracy. |  |                           |
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# Projectification

The Trojan horse of local government

Mats Fred



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*To Sture and Billy-Bo Fred*

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# List of abbreviations and figures

|       |   |
|-------|---|
| EPA   | European Project Analysis   |
| ESF   | European Social Fond  |
| IPM   | International Project Management Association  |
| KFSK  | Skåne association of local authorities (Kommunförbundet skåne)                        |
| NPG   | New Public Governance   |
| NPM   | New Public Management   |
| PMBOK | Project Management Book of Knowledge  |
| PMI   | Project Management Institute  |
| SKL   | Swedish Association of Local and Regional Authorities (Sveriges Kommuner & Landsting) |

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## INTRODUCTION



# Projectification as a Trojan horse

[The European cohesion policy] works as a ‘Trojan horse’ to improve and modernize public administrations, to enhance transparency, and to foster good governance (Inforegio, 2008:4).

The analogy above was formulated by the European commissioner Danuta Hübner, and the Trojan horse refers to the European cohesion policy trotting its way into public administrations around Europe with the good intentions of improvement and modernization. The EU Cohesion policy is the EU's main investment tool, delivered primarily through three different funds<sup>1</sup>, and the European Commission describes it as “the policy behind the hundreds of thousands of projects all over Europe” (ec.europe.eu, 2017). When Hübner talks about the Trojan horses that “modernize public administrations” and “foster good governance,” she is inherently talking about *projects*. Whereas the cohesion policy aims to increase economic growth and employment in all European regions and cities, the policy implicitly advocates projects as *the* organizational solution.<sup>2</sup>

The three funds implementing the cohesion policy are among the largest EU funds in terms of capital, and are the funds most frequently used by regional and local governments. Even so, they are just three of the approximately 350 different funds and programs funding project initiatives in European countries. More than 60% of the entire EU budget is managed through different project funding systems (Büttner & Leopold, 2016). Taking just one of these funds and only one country as an example, the ESF has financed over 90,000 projects since Sweden joined the European Union in 1995, and Swedish public-sector organizations are major recipients of these funds (www.esf.se, 2017; esf, 2014). Consequently, the EU has been described as an important factor pushing the

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<sup>1</sup> The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Cohesion Fund (CF) and the European Social Fund (ESF).

<sup>2</sup> The project form is a prerequisite for receiving funds from many of the EU funds, including the ERDF, the CF and the ESF.

use of projects in European countries (see Jensen et al., 2017; Büttner & Leopold, 2016; Godenhjelm et al., 2015; Jałocha, 2012; Sjöblom & Godenhjelm, 2009).

Albeit important, the EU is not the only contributing factor in its promotion of the use of projects as organizational solutions to various problems. There are also influences coming from a variety of sources: international as well as national project management associations; project programs and courses at universities all over the world; consultants; civil servants, managers, and politicians at the local, regional and national levels engaging in, or advocating for, projects; and national, regional, and local funding agencies pushing for, or at least facilitating, project organizing.

All these efforts and activities encourage entities to organize using projects and to adapt the “ordinary,” permanent organizations to future project activities. Rules and norms associated with project management that guide personal and organizational behavior also pervade and connect these activities and actors, as does a (project) language and vocabulary used to describe, communicate, and make sense of organizational practices.

One of the main arguments in this thesis is that all of these efforts and actors support and encourage the same kind of logic—a common belief system with a common language and shared practices—a project logic. Inspired by the institutional logic perspective (Thornton, et al., 2012; Scott, 2008), I view the public sector as sites where several, coexisting institutional logics are “available” for civil servants and politicians alike to act upon and translate into practices. The growing importance of the project logic in relation to other logics, and the resulting consequences, are a vital part of what I refer to here as *projectification*.

The project logic, however, is somewhat more elusive than the specific projects. It sometimes takes place, I argue, implicitly or “under the radar” (Reay & Hinings, 2009)—in other words, like a Trojan horse. Even though the ancient Greek story of the wooden horse used to help Greek troops invade the city of Troy by stealth is far more malevolent than processes of projectification, it tells the story of putting something upfront while hiding something else, and is a story of unexpected changes. When an organization launches a project aimed at tackling issues such as unemployment, gender equality or social exclusion it expects—or hopes for—positive effects on the employment rates or improvements in gender equality. Merton (1968) calls these expected consequences of organizational behaviour *manifest functions*. Consequences coming from the organizational form of the project, however, such as

organizational impermanence, visibility, adaption and the mobilization of project capacity are seldom explicitly stated, intended, or even recognized. These more “concealed” consequences are what Merton call *latent functions* (ibid.), a description that fits in well with the analogy of projectification as a Trojan horse.

In the project management literature, the project is often described as a technicality, a method “at our disposal,” a neutral, apolitical instrument used to deliver predefined objectives within a specific time frame (Sahlin-Andersson & Söderholm, 2002). Projects are treated as *means to an end*, and are not expected to influence anything in their own right. Projects in general, however, are not to be regarded as neutral devices merely delivering goods, but as policy instruments that “produce specific effects, independently of their stated objectives (the aims ascribed to them),” and they structure their surroundings according to a specific logic (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2007:3).

In addition, the project form is often a result of funding requirements or organizations instinctively turning to projects when addressing certain issues. In this thesis, I investigate latent consequences and organizational effects not specified in the project objectives or in the funding requirements—consequences that are seldom taken into account, unexpected effects, and organizational changes that may even go unnoticed.

While a great deal has been written about traditional project management, we know surprisingly little about the actualities of project-based work in the public sector; what is going on in these organizational settings, and how does the intensification of project activities change (if at all) the practices of public organizations? Traditional research on projects has focused on single projects as units of analysis, and “taken the form of recipes and handbooks on how to manage better” (Sahlin-Andersson & Söderholm, 2002:12; Packendorff & Lindgren, 2014; Svensson et al., 2013). The research on projectification, on the other hand, has focused mainly on the increasing number of projects (see Bergman et al., 2013; Brady & Hobday, 2011; Maylor et al., 2006). The efficiency of specific projects, however, or the notion of an increasing number of projects (efficient or not) does not tell us much about how the projects unfold or what the consequences are for the organizations, the employees or the institutional environment. Projectification must be understood, therefore, as something that goes beyond the increasing use of projects, and must also include project-related beliefs, language, and practices embedded in an

organizational and institutional environment. No project, in this respect, is an island, as Engwall (2003) so eloquently wrote.

Here I borrow and stretch Hübner's analogy of the Trojan horse to include not only the implementation of the cohesion policy, but to include all forms of organizing that encourage project activities. Projects produce specific effects of their own, regardless of the aims and objectives ascribed to them. These effects are manifested through the propagation and amplification of the project logic: a logic applied to, or absorbed by, traditional, permanent local government organizations that results in new forms of routines, practices and a "projectified" way for civil servants and politicians alike to present, understand and make sense of their work. This projectification may have vast consequences for the tax-financed, politically, and democratically-run institutions and practices, and is hence important to study.

## Aim, research questions and research design

With this thesis, I hope to contribute to research on organizational and institutional changes in public sector organizations, with special reference to public sector projectification.

*The aim of the thesis is to conceptualize local government projectification by answering the question of how the project logic is manifested in practice, and what the consequences of the project logic are for local government organizations and their employees.*

By conceptualize, I'm referring to the literal meaning of the word: "to form a concept of" (Merriam-Webster, 2017) or "to interpret a phenomenon by forming a concept" (Wiktionary, 2017). Departing from an institutional logic perspective informed by translation theory, and by analysing earlier research on projects, projectification and public-sector reform as well as the empirical case of Eslöv—a Swedish mid-sized local government as embedded in a multilevel institutional complex—I aim to enhance our understandings of local government projectification. My conceptualization, therefore, entails a combination of analyses of earlier research and theories, as well as empirical investigations.

Inspired by institutional ethnography, my entry point to the field has been the everyday activities and experiences of individuals. I start "with the facts" as Swedberg (2012:33) puts it, and how they are *manifested in practice*.

When I speak of practices, I'm referring to the practice of doing and saying something in a specific place and time. Focusing on practices is thus taking the social and material doing of something as the main focus of the inquiry (Nicolini, 2009:122.). However, these practices are also viewed as "hooked into, shaped by, and constituent of the institutional relations under exploration" (DeVault & McCoy, 2006:18). In my case, these institutional relations are studied as co-existing and competing institutional *logics* (Thornton et al., 2012; Reay & Hinings, 2009) that local government employees may act upon and that translate into practices (see Clarke et al., 2016;2015; Lindberg, 2014; Czarniawska & Sevón, 2005).

Thornton and Ocasio (1999: 804) define institutional logics as "the socially constructed, historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their social reality." I suggest that four specific logics are important in the study of local government projectification: a bureaucratic logic, a market logic, a political logic, and the project logic. I propose the argument of projectification as the growing importance of the project logic—a logic that emphasizes somewhat different (compared to other logics) ways to interpret, practice, describe and prescribe what is and should be going on in local government. The project logic may influence and change some aspects of the other logics, and amplify and complement some characteristics in those logics while clashing with or preventing others.

As a result, I propose three different, but interrelated, conceptualizations of projectification in this thesis: *projectification as proliferation*, emphasizing the increasing use and diffusion of projects and project ideas; *projectification as transformation and adaptation* highlights processes of transformation of "permanent" ordinary organizational activities into temporary projects, and processes of adaptation in the surrounding organizations and structures; and *projectification as organizational capacity building*, focusing on the diffusion of the project logic in local government organizations not mainly through specific projects, but through practices encouraging the project logic and reinforcing local government's organizational project capacity.

## Why local government?

There are many motivations for studying public sector projectification at the local level, and in Sweden. First, and more generally, local government is a political institution that is governed by elected officials, and whose activities are financed by income taxes from its citizens. Second, and connected to the first, local government (at least in a Swedish context) is a central part of many people's lives, and affects their everyday experience in the form of preschool, elementary school, garbage collection, snow removal, elder care and social services. How local government is organized, and the consequences of its organization are (or ought to be) of general interest. Third, local government is important because it is a key site in arenas of vertical as well as horizontal network governance, since it shares decision-making responsibilities with others (Fenwick et al., 2012:2; see also: Bovaird, 2007; Kelly, 2006; Johnson & Osborne, 2003). Fourth, in a European context, the local level is a vital area for development work, and an essential location for implementing EU policy.

In terms of projectification, several researchers stress the importance of context when studying projects (see Bakker, 2010; Sydow et al., 2004; Engwall, 2003; Grabher 2002), but that context has seldom been the public sector or local government. Local government is an appropriate case, since local authorities engage in many projects; they regard projects as highly important for development and put a lot of energy and resources into project activities (see Fred, 2015; www.esf.se, 2017).

## The “case” – Eslöv and beyond

In this thesis, I have “followed” local government civil servants, managers and politicians for about five years—interviewing them, observing and participating in meetings, conferences and fieldtrips to make sense of their local government practices. Many of the people I have followed are (or have been) employed by the municipality of Eslöv, a medium-sized municipality in the southern part of Sweden. Eslöv has its own project model, as well as a project funding system and a project policy. Inspired by the concept of *action net* (Lindberg & Czarniawska, 2006), however, my “case” has not been restricted to Eslöv alone, as a specific organization or place. Rather, Eslöv has functioned as a starting point from which I have followed the actions related to projects and projectification. Several other municipalities as well as a regional government agency (Region Skåne), the Swedish association of local authorities and regions



(Sveriges kommuner och landsting, SKL) and some consultants have, as a result of me following the actions of Eslöv employees, become important parts of my research. Through the action net approach, I have been able to study projectification up-close and in depth, as well as in terms of a phenomenon stretching beyond one specific organization.

## Contributing to a research field in the making

Research on projectification has mainly centered around a private sector setting, and has been directed toward the level of the individual project. This research has focused mostly on the *why* question of projectification, restricted the *what* question to the quantity of projects, and made only a few attempts at answering the *how* question. One exception to this is the seminal work of Midler and his studies of Renault and how they transformed from an “ordinary” car manufacture to a project-based organization throughout the 70s, 80s and 90s (Midler, 1995). However important, that study is more than 20 years old, takes place in a private sector setting, and is addressed from a business management perspective. Moreover, there are arguably noticeable differences between projects in a private-sector context and a public-sector context (see Baldry, 1998). First, a public-sector setting is by definition a political setting. Second, public sector projects are rarely of a commercial nature. They often rely upon the authority of a “permanent,” usually democratically accountable, organization. And where a project in a private sector context may regard efficiency or financial gain as success criteria, the public-sector projects often add to that “public values” such as equity, transparency, accountability or inclusion (see Löfgren & Allan, forthcoming).

With this thesis, I intend to contribute not only to the research field of public sector projectification,<sup>3</sup> but also add value to the broader fields of political science, institutional theory, ethnographical research and discussions of organizational and institutional changes in public administration.

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<sup>3</sup> See: Hodgson et al., forthcoming; Sanderson & Winch, 2017 (special issue); Munck af Rosenschöld, 2017; Jensen et al., 2017; 2013; Fred & Hall, 2017; Murray Li, 2016; Godenhjelm, 2016 (PhD thesis); Schuster, 2015 (PhD thesis); Büttner & Leopold, 2016; Löfgren et al., 2013 (special issue); Jalocho, 2012; Kuura, 2011; Kovách & Kučerova, 2009; Sjöblom & Godenhjelm, 2009; Andersson, 2009; Sjöblom, 2009; 2006; Krohwinkel-Karlsson, 2009; Johansson et al., 2007.

## Thesis outline

The thesis is divided into three parts. The first part is called *Projectification—Challenges, logics and methods*, and includes chapters 2, 3 and 4. This part is devoted to “setting the stage.” In chapter 2, I propose three historical developments of particular importance to our understanding of modern public-sector projects and projectification: public management reforms, the legacy of *the project* as a device for engineering and technology, and the development of the European Union project funding systems. These developments are relevant to contemporary project practices in that they, in different ways, helped to pave the way for the use of public sector projects, and are still influencing the public sector and project practices today. In chapter 3, inspired by the institutional logic perspective and translation theorists, I propose that local government be regarded as a site at which several, coexisting and competing institutional logics are “available” for civil servants and politicians alike to act upon and translate into practices. Projectification may thus be viewed in light of the growing importance of the project logic at the expense of other logics. In chapter 4, I describe in some detail how I have worked to conceptualize local government projectification and how I, with an institutional ethnography approach, have studied the coexisting logics mainly through observations and interviews, but also through studies of different kinds of documents.

The second part, *Projectification of local government—Eslöv and beyond*, includes three empirical chapters, each representing a specific conceptualization of projectification. All empirical chapters start out in Eslöv, but include a description of the wider institutional settings as well. In chapter 5, I describe projectification as proliferation and how clearly defined projects and project ideas, to an increasing extent, are organized and diffused within and between local government organizations. In more theoretical terms, the chapter is intended to demonstrate different, sometimes contradictory, logics at play in practice due to project proliferation. In chapter 6, I use social investment as a case of projectification to conceptualize processes of organizational transformation and adaptation due to the project logic. In chapter 7, I take a closer look at the subtler aspects of projectification. Here I conceptualize how the project logic is spread and diffused in local government organizations, not through specific projects, but through practices encouraging the project logic, and how that reinforces local government’s organizational project capacity.

The third part, *Projectification—the Trojan horse of local government*, including chapters 8 and 9, is devoted to discussion and conclusions, and is where I present my research findings in relation to earlier research on projectification and local government, and sum up my research contribution.



## PART ONE

Projectification – Challenges, logics and methods

Part I of the thesis, including chapters 2, 3 and 4, is intended to introduce the reader to the research field of public sector projectification, and to how I have studied the phenomenon in local government.

In chapter 2, I describe three historical developments of particular importance to our understanding of the practices of modern public-sector projects: public management reforms, the legacy of *the project* as a device for engineering and technology, and the development of the European Union project funding systems. These developments are relevant to contemporary project practices in that they, in different ways, helped to pave the way for the use of public sector projects, and are still influencing the public sector and project practices today.

In chapter 3, I delve deep into the concept of institutional logics and how they are useful when conceptualizing institutional and organizational change. When combining an institutional logic perspective with studies of local government practices, the notion of translation also becomes relevant, and is further developed in this chapter. I propose that local government be regarded as a site at which several coexisting and competing institutional logics are “available” to civil servants, managers and politicians alike to act upon and translate into practices. Projectification may thus be viewed in the light of the growing importance of the project logic at the expense of other logics.

In chapter 4, I describe methodological considerations taken throughout the research process, how I have gathered empirical material—through observations, interviews and document studies—and analyzed it in terms of local government projectification. My overarching methodological approach is that of an institutional ethnographer, an approach encouraging me to start in the experiences of individuals to find and describe social processes that may have generalizing effects. However, the chapter is also a description of my personal journey and how I ended up writing a thesis aiming to conceptualize local government projectification.

# Tensions in public sector project management – an overview

There is almost nothing in people's lives these days that is as permanent as it used to be two or three generations ago. The church no longer plays the same role; peoples' occupation no longer plays the same role. This makes us nervous, and more compatible, as people say these days, to new changes, but at the same time it makes us 'homeless,' and I think a model for this could be the project. We live in the project! (Fioretos, 2013).<sup>4</sup>

Aris Fioretos is a Swedish Poet and professor of aesthetics who argues that almost nothing, in contemporary societies, appears to be intended to last very long—at least not in a constant form. In a similar manner, Zygmunt Bauman (2006) describes today's society as consisting of looser forms or shapes that can be put together, picked apart, and then reassembled again at short notice. For instance, he describes how companies have deliberately integrated forms of disorganization: the less solid and more flexible and fluid the organization, the better.

In this chapter, we start with the opposite of these flexible, temporary and liquid entities: with local government bureaucracy, often depicted as something old-fashioned, stable and “permanent”. I begin the chapter with the 1970s critiques of the bureaucratic model, and then describe how bureaucracy has been criticized and challenged by ideas similar to those of Fioretos and Bauman. The chapter is a literature overview of research on public sector reforms and research on projects and projectification, and aims to contextualize my study, and function as a starting point for analysis.

The chapter can be read as an argument in which I propose three historical developments of particular importance for our understanding of modern public-sector projects and projectification. The first is the connection

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<sup>4</sup> A transcript from a Swedish TV show. My translation from Swedish.

between the increasing use of projects and public management reforms. The second is the historical legacy of *the project* as developed in the US military and space programs, and areas such as engineering technology. The third is the EU as a precursor in terms of organizing through projects and the implementation of project funding systems. These historical developments are of importance for contemporary project practices as they, in different ways, helped to pave the way for the use of public sector projects, and are still influencing public sector and project practices today.

## Reforming bureaucracy – a brief historical overview

The first historical development to consider when studying projectification in a public-sector context is that of public sector reforms, and how those relate to organizing via projects. In this section I investigate organizational principles of bureaucracy and its critique, demonstrated primarily through reforms and ideas for reform. I argue that the wave of reform targeting Western public administrations during the last couple of decades also helped promote the use of project organizations and foster the idea of projects as both rational devices for control and as flexible, innovative, solutions to various problems.

It is hard to underestimate the importance of bureaucracy as an organizational model in modern societies (Diefenbach & Todnem by, 2012; Styhre, 2007). Contemporary public administrations are organized in accordance with a bureaucratic organizational model, consisting of a set of principles and mechanisms first summarized by Max Weber in the early 1900s. Examples of such principles are functional divisions of labor, hierarchical and rule-governed processes, and the employment of professional staff with the right education and experience for the job (Weber, 1948:215). In the 1950s and 1960s there was quite extensive research focusing on bureaucracy as an organizational form and its practical functionalities, as well as studies of the obstacles/challenges or opportunities confronting civil servants in these organizations (Styrhe, 2007). From the 1980s onward, there was a decline in the interest in bureaucracy and the concept was transformed from a set of principles or hypotheses that lent themselves to empirical investigations, into more of a stagnant idea about a hierarchical and inflexible organizational structure (ibid).



Already in late 1960, Bennis declared that bureaucracy as an organizational model was about to disappear. It was out of step with contemporary realities, he argued. Instead, organizations of the future

...will be adaptive, rapidly changing temporary systems, organized around problems-to-be-solved by groups of relative strangers with diverse professional skills... Organization charts will consist of project groups rather than stratified functional groups, as now is the case (Bennis, 1970:45).

In his book *The Temporary Society*, Bennis (1969) launches the concept of adhocracy. This concept was further developed by Mintzberg (1983), as a flexible, adaptable and informal type of organization that “is able to fuse experts drawn from different disciplines into smoothly functioning ad hoc project teams” (p. 254). Twenty years after Bennis’s article, Osborne and Gaebler (1992) described bureaucracy as being fundamentally out of step with the environment in which it operates, and some years after that, Ulrich Beck (2005) described it as a zombie—something still living but to all intents and purposes dead. Bennis and his successors’ critique of bureaucracy can be viewed in light of the “unending wave of reforms” (Pollitt, 2002) that started sometime in the late 1970s, and which brought concepts like efficiency, results orientation, and value for money to the agendas of Western societies’ public administrations reforms (Homburg et al., 2007).

Public sector bureaucracy was viewed as inefficient and loaded with inflexible procedures, and there was a “waning public acceptance of old style public administration” (Homburg et al., 2007:1) that called for ideas of modernization. Many of these ideas for modernizing the public sector have become known as New Public Management (NPM) (Hood, 1991). NPM has rather profoundly changed public administrations in countries such as New Zealand, the US, the UK and the Nordic countries, and there really “was not an option for states to reject the NPM project, at least not if they wanted to be perceived as progressive and modern” (Jacobsson et al., 2015:11).

In terms of organization, NPM reforms called for something beyond bureaucracy, with ideals of flat hierarchies, teamwork, networking, flexibility and customer-orientation—ideals captured in the concept of *post-bureaucratic organizations* (Diefenbach & Todnem By, 2012; McSweeney, 2006; Räsänen & Linde, 2004; Iedema, 2003; Heckscher & Donnellon, 1994). The post-bureaucratic organization denotes a variety of organizational forms that in

various respects deviate from the Weberian bureaucratic model (Styhre, 2007:109). Organization theorists have described, as well as prescribed, a movement away from bureaucracy as something “hierarchical, rule enforcing, impersonal in the application of laws, and constituted by members with specialized technical knowledge of rules and procedures” (Parker & Bradley, 2000:130) toward organizations characterized by collaboration, teamwork, decentralization of authority, and reduced management layers (see Byrkjeflot & du Gay, 2012; Clegg, 1990; Cooke, 1990). Examples of post-bureaucratic organizations are: virtual organizations (see Alexander, 1997; Fitzpatrick et al., 2000); network organizations (Black & Edwards, 2000); and project organizations.

Post-bureaucratic organizations, however, have not eradicated bureaucratic organizations, but rather supplemented them (see Byrkjeflot & du Gay, 2012; Styhre, 2006; 2007). As an organizational form, bureaucracy seldom occurs in “pure” form. Weber described the principles of bureaucracy as an ideal model, and “most organizations combine features of bureaucracy and professionalism, or of bureaucracy and managerialism, and even bureaucracy and entrepreneurship” (Newman, 2005:191). Although important—especially in local government—bureaucracy is just one of several influential models affecting organizing styles. Following this line of thought, du Gay (2005) describes how bureaucracy “has turned out to be less a hard and fast trans-historical model, but rather what we might describe as a many-sided, evolving, diversified organizational device” (p. 3). The changing role of bureaucracy and NPM reforms has introduced a number of new organizational forms in contemporary public administrations, and Godenhjelm (2016) argues that “the most significant changes brought on by an increasing use of new governance mechanisms is the proliferation of project organizations” (p. 35).

### **Projects as a response to perceived bureaucratic failure**

When defining projects, researchers and practitioners alike frequently refer to the project management institute (PMI), which defines projects as “a temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product or service” (PMI, 2008:5). Inspired by the PMI, the European Commission defines a project as “a single, non-divisible intervention with a fixed time schedule and dedicated budget” (EC, 1997:4). Godenhjelm (2016) claims that the funding principles of the European Union (organizing in project form is a prerequisite for receiving funds

from the EU) reinforce “the inclination to define almost all reform activities as projects” (p. 36; see also Andersson, 2009).

Public sector projects are often motivated by a desire to break with earlier habits in order to experiment, to promote innovation and change as well as efficiency (Svensson et al., 2011; Sjöblom, 2006; Sahlin-Andersson & Söderholm, 2002). Projects are used to develop local government practices and/or to handle complex problems that are thought of as problematic to solve within the realm of the ordinary organization (see Styhre, 2007). The project format is attractive. One reason for the intensification of projects seems to be that projects are “perceived as a controllable way of avoiding all the classic problems of bureaucracy” (Packendorff & Lindgren, 2014: 7). In terms of post-bureaucracy, the project is regarded as more flexible and organic than the bureaucracy, and the project manager is also given a clearer mandate to manage the operations and make decisions based on established objectives. The projects often aim to change something within the ordinary organizations, and the intended changes come in the form of project ideas: projects aimed at dealing with unemployment in a new way, project ideas for new collaborative working methods, or ideas targeting social exclusion, for instance. Projects are regarded as a means to change working methods and/or improve efficiency in order to reach better results. The rationale of these ideas is that they start out in project form to do something different than what is done in the ordinary organizations, and if successful implement, and thus change something, in the permanent structures.

Hence, the very idea of “the project” is to temporarily organize a multiplicity of competencies within one single structure to deal with specific and highly specialized tasks that a functionally organized organization—such as a traditional local government—fails to deal with (Styhre, 2007).

The post-bureaucratic “break” with bureaucracy is also a manifestation of the will to act, to change and to be modern. There is a perceived pressure on public sector organizations to be more flexible, and as a result “new management techniques [such as projects have been] adopted in an attempt to overcome bureaucratic pathologies, including inefficiency and inflexibility” (Parker & Bradley, 2004: 198).

One of the fundamental principles of post-bureaucratic organizations are the efforts taken to make work processes more visible. While the traditional bureaucratic organization relies on the expertise of its employees and their compliance with regulations, there is no need to highlight their work for the

entire organization. However, in a post-bureaucratic organization, team work is often used and organized in temporary form. A common map of the environment is then needed, and much effort is put into describing work processes (Styhre, 2007; Iedema, 2003). This is also why it is common to find projects with “creative” names, with logotypes, and all sorts of marketing materials in which the projects are described as innovative or “extraordinary” (see Sahlin-Andersson, 2002:252ff). When organizing via projects, visibility and planning become more important than in ordinary bureaucracy—to show what is going on and what is going to happen is part of “the package,” or part of the logic, that comes with organizing in project form.

### **Projects vs. bureaucracy**

The distinction often made in the literature between ordinary, permanent organizations on the one hand and temporary, project organizations on the other is not so easy to make in practice. Sahlin-Andersson and Söderholm (2002) argue that even routines and continuous work processes are, to an increasing extent, “presented and understood as projects” (p. 15). As such, organizations traditionally characterized by permanence are now described and understood as projects—defined by assignments (rather than goals), by time (rather than survival), by teams (rather than working organizations) and by transition (rather than continuous development) (Fred, 2015).<sup>5</sup> Anell and Wilson (2002) argue that organizations—temporary as well as permanent—should be understood as flows of activities that are more closely linked than what present theory indicates. Their argument is based on the idea that employees go back and forth between the permanent and the temporary organizations and thus “carry with them priorities associated with the permanent organization from which they came or to which they are going” (Anell & Wilson, 2002:183). As a result, they argue, “the organization becomes more proficient at running projects” (p. 184).

While local government projects often imply flexibility, innovation, development and external funds, in practice they might very well lack innovative characteristics, be inflexible, funded “internally” or contribute more to

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<sup>5</sup> This is a paraphrase of Lundin & Söderholm’s (1995) comparison of permanent and temporary organizational features. They write: “Permanent organizations are more naturally defined by goals (rather than tasks), survival (rather than time), working organization (rather than team) and production processes and continual development (rather than transition).”

“production” than development. Meyer and Rowan (1977) explain this behavior by referring to how organizations sometimes build “gaps between their formal structures [policies and rules] and actual work activities” to “increase their legitimacy and their survival prospects” (p. 340-341). Simply put, the idea of a project and the actual practices of a project do not necessarily have to correspond. The same goes for the permanent organizations. The idea of these often signifies routine, hierarchy and stability, but in practice they might focus less on stability and the maintenance of routines, while demanding flexibility and change (see Sydow et al., 2004; Sjöblom & Godenhjelm, 2009).<sup>6</sup>

### **The relationship between NPM and projects**

Some researchers relate the perceived transition from bureaucracy to post-bureaucracy to the reforms of New Public Management (NPM). Parker and Bradley (2004) argue that there has been a shift in emphasis “from rule enforcement and administration to attainment of results through mission statements, performance management... decentralized structures, and an output orientation” (Parker & Bradley, 2004: 198; see also Jensen et al., 2017; Fred, 2015). The increased focus on performance and efficiency in public administration that is significant for NPM “resonates well with the ideals portrayed by project organizations whose unique and temporary nature is widely believed to lead to concrete results” (Godenhjelm, 2016:23; see also: Löfgren & Poulsen, 2013; Hall, 2007; Clegg and Courpasson, 2004; Crawford et al., 2003).

Even though it might be difficult to empirically verify—and a task beyond the scope of this thesis—I think one could pose the hypothesis that NPM contributes to the increasing use of projects and the increasing importance of ideals and values associated with projects. At the same time, the increasing use of projects in the public sector appears to reinforce ideals often associated with NPM. Hood (1991; 1995) describes NPM as composed of seven specific features—all resonating well with the project logic:

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<sup>6</sup> The observation that organizations are influenced by phenomena in their environments and even tend to become isomorphic with them, is not new (see Hawley, 1968; Thompson 1967; Meyer & Rowan, 1977), but is however yet to be conceptualized in terms of local government projectification.

1. The implementation of management techniques (with project management as one such technique).
2. The implementation of standards and performance measurements (increasing reliance on project models and project standards and the temporary character of projects makes measurements easier, with a clear-cut beginning and end).
3. Focus on control and output (a defining feature of projects).
4. Large organizations are broken down to smaller units (resulting in a further need for coordination and collaboration often resulting in projects—see below).
5. The introduction of competition (project funding is built upon ideas of competition, see the EU funds).
6. The introduction of flexible employment models and reward systems based on performance (project employments).
7. A greater focus on reducing costs (project budgeting and available external funding).

On the other hand, the increasing importance of projects in the public sector can also be viewed as a result of organizations trying to cope with the effects of NPM reforms. NPM has been described as leaving the public sector “fragmented,” with fewer large, multi-purpose organizations, and more single-, or limited-purpose organizations pursuing explicitly defined goals and targets (Abrahamsson & Agevall, 2009. Verhoest et, al. 2007). It has been argued that this development causes coordination problems, with many different organizations pursuing the same policy objectives (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011).

As a consequence of coordination problems, demands for collaboration have been evident in public administration. These demands, to a large extent—at least in a Swedish context—have been dealt with through temporary project organizations (see Forssell, et al., 2013; Jensen & Trägårdh, 2012; Löfström, 2010b). This is also evident in the many European funds (see the ESF, the ERDF, and the CF) that require collaboration between at least two “agents” in order to receive funds.

To solve problems that arise in a fragmented welfare apparatus, projects are viewed as a way to organize a multiplicity of competencies from several organizations within one single structure to deal with specific and highly specialized tasks that a functionally organized organization is unable to deal with (Styhre, 2007). The solution is temporary, however, since the projects tend

to “solve only one problem, for a limited time and for a restricted and continually changing target group” (Jensen & Trägårdh, 2012:857).

### **“New” reforms and more projects**

In the early 2000s, some researchers declared NPM dead (Dunleavy et al., 2006), while others (Pollitt, 2003) argued that it was by no means over, but was being challenged by new reforms that brought ideas of governance, partnerships, joined-up governments and trust and transparency to the agenda (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). Some researchers (Pierre & Peters, 2000; Kaufmann, et al., 2010; Osborne, 2010) have labeled these “new” reform ideas New Public Governance (NPG), referring to processes of governing in which the boundaries between the public, private, and voluntary sectors have blurred and in turn also changed the shape of bureaucracy (see Pierre & Peters, 2000, Rhodes, 2012). In contrast to NPM as a collection of tools for improving existing bureaucracy, NPG theories open up a broader view of horizontal ways of governing in which governments act alongside a variety of different actors (Hill & Hupe, 2009).

Pollitt & Bouckaert (2011) describe the developments coming from NPM and NPG reforms in terms of “geological sedimentation, where new layers overlie but do not replace or completely wash away the previous layer” (p. 8). This leaves room for several different—and perhaps even competing or contradicting—ideas and logics of public management to coexist.

The organization of projects in local government is a good case for viewing these coexisting sediments of NPM and NPG ideas, at the same time as one can detect the coexistence of bureaucratic, as well as post-bureaucratic, logics. When launching a project, it is not uncommon (as will be evident in chapters 5, 6 and 7), to refer to a fragmented organization (caused by NPM) in need of innovation, collaboration and governance structures (NPG), and at the same time use a project model to strengthen accountability and make the chain of command more visible (bureaucratic logic).

In sum, while interest in bureaucracy declined in the 1980s, and as the wave of reforms during the same period swept across Western societies proclaiming flexibility, efficiency and governance structures, there has also been an increased reliance on project organizations.

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<sup>7</sup> My translation from Swedish.

### **Project as a bureaucratic form and an innovative process**

Graeber (2015) argues that the only reason that we appear to have gradually lost interest in bureaucracy is that we have become used to it. “Bureaucracy has become the water in which we swim,” he argues, and we may not like to think about it, but bureaucracy “informs every aspect of our existence” (Graeber, 2015:5).

In terms of post-bureaucratic organizations, some question just how “post” these organizations are. Hodgson (2004) refers to project standards and project models and how these are designed to prescribe organizational activities, and he argues that project management in itself “can be seen as an essential bureaucratic system of control” (p. 88). Project management, Hodgson continues, “draws upon the central rhetoric of empowerment, autonomy and self-reliance central to post-bureaucratic organizational discourse” (ibid.), but at the same time, projects also tie employees “to a variety of technocratic planning, execution and reporting tools” (Räsänen & Linde, 2004: 103; see also Clegg & Courpasson, 2004).

Some suggest that project management combines the best of these two worlds: the rational notion of controllability, and the modern entrepreneurial focus on creativity and innovation (Hall, 2012; Clegg & Courpasson, 2004). In other words, projects are supposedly popular because they are able to deliver both “controllability and adventure” (Hodgson & Cicmil, 2006; see also Sahlin-Andersson, 2002; Sahlin, 1996). Describing the same dualistic organizational characteristics, but in a rather critical manner, Iedema (2003) argues that many organizations adopt what he calls “a post-bureaucratic rhetoric” while maintaining “traditional structural hierarchies, expert and specialization boundaries, and procedures and processes whose intent is top-down control rather than bottom-up facilitation” (p. 2).

Therefore, there appear to be (at least) two sides to projects that resonate with two almost contradictory sets of attributes: One with innovation, flexibility and a break with traditional, bureaucratic ideals and practices (resonating with the concept of post-bureaucratic organization), and the other, almost in contradiction with the first, supporting control, standard operating procedures and hierarchical structures (resonating more with the concept of traditional bureaucracy).



Sahlin (1996) describes parts of this duality in terms of projects being either a *form* or a *process*.<sup>8</sup> Viewed as a form, projects are planned, output-oriented activities with clearly defined objectives, whereas project as process is more closely associated with processes of organizational transformation and change. In the former case a project plan is thought of as a deliberate ambition to achieve specified objectives within a certain period through concretely defined activities, for a specific target group in a defined environment (*ibid.*). If the initial plan turns out to be difficult to achieve, however, changes could be made in terms of target group, objectives, activities or the environment, but it could still be regarded as “the same project”—the project *form* is in some sense superior to the “content” of the project.

On the other hand, when viewing projects as a process, the project is more associated with anticipations of development, innovation and change (Gerholm, 1985, in Sahlin, 1996). Processes of organizational change are emphasized when evaluating the projects, and reinterpretations and negotiations in terms of the original objectives are regarded as a necessity throughout the process. How the project unfolds is more important than that it reaches pre-defined goals—the project itself is the goal. Local government collaboration projects are a good example of this, where collaboration, regardless of the objectives of the specific activities, is often the goal itself and is carried out through projects (see Forssell et al., 2013).

### **Intentions with the projects**

In addition to function as a device to define what a project is, this duality between form and process also directs our attention to different actors' intentions with the projects. The project, viewed as a form, Sahlin argues, may be used to legitimize project initiatives (Sahlin, 1996). Defining open-ended objectives (increasing employability, reducing social exclusion) that appeal to common values may, for instance, encourage cooperation between different groups of actors or organizations. A well-designed and well-formulated project that expresses an appealing vision of the future is likely to receive a great deal of support, especially before the project is launched (Sahlin, 1996:252). Receiving funding for a project aimed at preventing drug abuse or combating

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<sup>8</sup> Packendorff (1995) makes a similar distinction between projects as plans on the one hand, and projects as temporary organizations on the other hand.

xenophobia, for instance, can give the organization initiating the project legitimacy and trust, not least in the eyes of the citizens who are being led to believe that something is being done to deal with the problems at hand (ibid.). In this respect, projects may be an important tool for politicians or management in local government to gain support and trust, but also to show decisiveness. A politician or a civil servant can refer to money received or allocated for a specific issue or a project that has just been launched to handle a particular situation. In the “project as a form perspective,” the initiation and launching phase of a project is of great importance, while the result of the project or how it is carried out is of less interest.

Viewed as a process, projects could be a great power and management tool to control and direct the organization and its processes (Sahlin, 1996). A practical example of this are the calls for projects announced by the many different EU funds or by different governmental agencies; or, as in my case, the local government itself. These calls are great ways to direct the attention of the organization, and get employees to think about and work toward the goals proposed in the calls. Furthermore, by organizing something through a project funding system with project calls, the organization not only directs attention, but also endorses competition between project ideas and between civil servants or departments.

**Fig. 1 Project as form and project as process**

|       | <b>Project as form</b>   | <b>Project as process</b>                                       |
|-------|--|---|
| Focus | Planning<br>Output orientation<br>Clearly pre-defined objectives | Organizational transformation<br>Innovation<br>Change processes |
| Use   | To legitimize and/or show decisiveness                           | To direct and/or govern civil servants and organizations        |

Project as a form has a long tradition in the literature on projects, whereas project as process is a more recent phenomenon. Researchers interested in public sector projects often refer to projects as originating from a private-sector context and from areas such as engineering and technology—areas perhaps more in tune with project as a form. The public sector, however, organizes a diverse set of policy areas ranging all the way from IT, housing, street maintenance (the “harder” policy areas) to social services, pre-school, education,

leisure and culture (the “softer” policy areas). The “harder” policy areas are seemingly more suitable for projects as form, but even the “softer” policy areas are exposed to projects as form through project management courses, project consultants prescribing project models, and standards that, to a great extent, rely upon the traditional legacy of project as form (see Thomas & Mengel, 2008).

## Project research – a brief historical overview

The second historical development to consider when studying projectification in both the public and private sector settings is that of the contextual background to project organizations and project management. Projects in the public sector often imply innovation and organizational change. As noted above, however, the practices of projects also rely on ideas of detailed planning, reporting procedures and control. These ideas, or characteristics, of project practice are inherited from areas such as engineering and technology, and the US military and space programs of the 1950s and 60s.

One might argue that projects have always been around: from the building of the pyramids and Columbus’ journey to “West India,” to the Vikings’ brigandage or the Swedish war against Denmark during 1512-1520, which was conducted by Sten Sture the Younger. These might very well be projects, but our contemporary understanding of projects evolved first in the middle of the 20th century within the US military and space programs.

The overwhelming scale—in terms of resources and ambitious timing—of military and space projects such as the Manhattan Project or the Apollo space programs created daunting challenges of coordination and control, which led to a professionalization of the project manager (Grabher, 2002; Winch, 2000; Engwall, 1995). Several techniques for project planning and project monitoring developed during this period, such as the Work-Breakdown Structure (WBS), Gantt chart, Critical Path Method (CPM), Graphical Evaluation and Review Technique (GERT), and Program Evaluation and Review Technique (PERT).

PERT, for example, was created by the U.S. Navy while developing the Polaris Missile project. Concerned about the Soviet Union’s growing nuclear arsenal, the US government wanted the Polaris project completed quickly, and used PERT to coordinate the efforts of some 3,000 contractors involved in the project (Kerzner, 2003). PERT can best be described as a visual depiction of

the major project activities and the sequence in which the different activities had to be completed. Activities are defined as distinct steps toward completion of the project that consume either time or resources. For each activity, managers are required to provide an estimate of the time needed to complete it (ibid.). PERT was, of course, not the only model and technique developed, but is perhaps one of the most influential and widespread.

Thomas & Mengel (2008, In Ljung, 2011:42) argue that project techniques such as PERT still represent the main components in project management courses around the world today. Despite criticism (see Engwall, 1995; Frame, 1994; Morris, 1994; Archibald, 1992) and an awareness of the shortcomings of these techniques and models, they have retained a firm grip on the project manager's toolbox over the years. In part, this has to do with the fact that the models seem to play a significant role in many projects (see Brulin & Svensson, 2012). Another contributing factor may be the extensive activities of professional associations like the Project Management Institute (PMI) and the International Project Management Association (IPMA). The overarching aim of these associations is quality assurance in project management through standardization of techniques and certification of project managers (Ljung, 2011). The underlying view of associations such as the IPMA and the PMI is that projects are fundamentally similar; the same methods, models and tools can be applied to all organizational environments—contracting as well as public health, the private sector as well as the public sector.

The PMI also distributes *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge* (PMBOK), perhaps one of the most influential titles in project management. The book has been an important model for the EU's project funding systems (see Godenhjelm et al., 2015; PMBOK, 2008). The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) also issued a standard on project management in 2013—*ISO 21500 Guidance on project management*—that, according to them, overlaps with the PMBOK, “with more than 95% of the processes mentioned in ISO 21500” (ISO, 2013:6).

Committing to ISO 21500 means that all of the stakeholders in project environments speak the same language and work with the same ‘big picture’ in mind, thus improving communication (ISO, 2013:6).

These models and standards aim to provide guidance in project practices, and one important ingredient in providing this guidance is project-specific

vocabulary and language. No matter what task you have in front of you, the project models/standards are there to help you and your co-workers and collaboration partners or stakeholders to describe, talk about and understand the task the same way. Moreover, they are marketed as generically applicable to all organizations. The ISO standard is described as being useful for “any type of organization, including public, private or community organizations, and for any type of project, irrespective of complexity, size or duration” (ISO 21500).

### Critique of the “traditional” perspective on projects

Accordingly, there is an extensive body of research supporting the aim to build “better” and more efficient project organizations through models and standards like ISO, PERT or PMBOK. This perspective—sometimes referred to as the traditional perspective on projects—is based on a prescribed set of tools and techniques, and predicated on a definition of project success as being *on time*, *on budget* and *to specification* (Whsocki, 2014:42; Whittaker, 1999). The traditional perspective has been criticized, particularly on the part of critical management scholars, who argue that the research has tried to provide “recipes and handbooks on how to manage better” (Sahlin-Andersson & Söderholm, 2002:12; see also Hodgson, Cicmil, 2006; Kenis et al., 2009). The research has a prescriptive character, it is argued, and some scholars oppose the largely atheoretical and apolitical quest for improved efficiency and the rush to build “better” organizations and educate “better” managers (see Clegg et al. 2006:266; Morgan & Spicer, 2009).

The criticism has focused on the entire paradigm of traditional project research, arguing that it is normative, atheoretical, and lacks a sufficient conception of power (see Hodgson & Cicmil, 2008; 2007; Clegg et al. 2006; Sahlin-Andersson & Söderholm 2002; Morris et al., 2011). Some critics also argue that the traditional perspective simply does not represent the way projects are managed, manifested or function in practice (see Ivory et al., 2006; Lindgren & Packendorff, 2003; Whittaker, 1999). One core argument from the critical perspective—inspired by organizational theorists—is that projects cannot be isolated from their environments. They should be viewed as temporary organizations embedded in specific contexts, and these contexts matter for what happens in the projects, how it happens and why (see Bakker, 2010; Grabher 2002; Engwall, 2003; Sydow and Staber 2002; Lundin & Söderholm, 1995).

This thesis adheres to this critical body of literature in the sense that my contribution does not consist of techniques for how to build better public-sector projects, but serves, rather, as an enhancement of our knowledge about the increased use of projects and project-related activities in the public sector.

## Project organizations and the EU – a brief historical overview

The third historical development to consider when studying projectification in a public-sector context is that of the EU. One cannot underestimate its importance and impact on the European public sector and local governments in terms of projectification.

The EU is a major source for project activities in the European member countries, and is an important mechanism behind public sector projectification.<sup>9</sup> Most EU policies, in almost all areas of EU policy-making are implemented, in one way or another, via project funding, and the bulk of the EU budget is managed through these funds. Today, the many different EU funds follow a similar logic in which organizations may apply for funding from the national agency managing the specific funds or from the directorate in Brussels that handles the sector programs.<sup>10</sup> The funds are “available” for project ideas that meet specific criteria specified by the agencies in relation to the commission, and often set for a programming period of five years.

This was not always the case, however, but a “consequence of a deliberately designed strategy” dating back all the way to the signing of the Rome Treaty in 1957 (Etzioni, 1965:269). Back then “almost all the changes and adjustments the members were expected to make under the treaty were divided into numerous small steps” (Etzioni, 1965:270). If we take the European Social Fund (ESF) as an example, it was installed at the very beginning of the union, but has grown in terms of money, and been reformed

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<sup>9</sup> see Büttner, 2011; Büttner & Leopold, 2016; Fred, 2015; Godenhjelm, 2013; Godenhjelm, Lundin, & Sjöblom, 2015; Kováč & Kučerová, 2009; Sjöblom & Godenhjelm, 2009.

<sup>10</sup> In Sweden ESF-rådet and Tillväxtverket handle the five most frequently used funds by local governments: The European Regional Development Fund, European Social Fund, Cohesion Fund, European Agriculture fund for Rural Development, and European Maritime and Fishery Fund.

several times throughout the years, in small step-by-step procedures. The ESF started out with a retroactive approach for compensating already existing projects, and the commission “acted as a banker, reimbursing Member States for half of the training costs involved in getting people back into employment” (Brine, 2002:29).

In the late 1970s, important steps were taken for the organization of the funds when two *Integrated Development Programmes* (IDP) were installed as pilots, one in Italy and one in Northern Ireland. This marked a shift from retroactive spending on individual projects to the support of program financing. Following the same procedure, the *Integrated Mediterranean Programmes* (IMP) in Greece, Italy and France were instituted in 1988. The IDP and the IMPs were precursors to what later became the EU Cohesion Policy. During this time, the structural funds, including the ESF, were reformed once again with the aim of implementing partnerships “between all the parties actively involved in structural policy, especially regional and local authorities” (Brine, 2002:646). Meanwhile, the signing of the Single European Act (1988/1989), which in practice meant a move away from annual budgeting toward multi-annual financial frameworks (MFF) was signed. The multi-annual financial frameworks also brought standardization to all areas of EU policy-making, and from that point in time, all programming periods of individual policy areas corresponded with each other (Büttner & Leopold, 2016:11ff).

Today, project management is institutionalized within the EU and diffused to the member states through different project funding systems. The organization of the funds also forces the member states and the regional as well as local authorities to adapt to receive funding. It should be noted that several of these funds—approximately 350 in total—require co-financing from the organizations applying for funds. In addition to influencing local government practices through project funding aimed at specific EU-objectives, and funds prescribing the project as the organizational form, these funds also impact how local governments allocate their own resources.

Parts of these processes of adaptation are discussed in the literature of “Europeanization” (see Börzel & Risse, 2000), but not from a projectification perspective. Europeanization has been understood as a top-down process in which member states adopt to EU politics and policy (Olsen, 2002). It has also been understood as a two-way, bidirectional, process in which member states influence or shape EU policies and institutions by “uploading” their policies and institutions and then adapt to outcomes made at the EU level by “downloading”

EU policies and institutions into the domestic arena (Quaglia et al., 2007). Adding to this bidirectional conceptualization, Radaelli et al. (2006) argue that Europeanization also entails “horizontal dynamics” in which economically wealthy, urbanized Western states impose their values and methods (regarding environmental policy, for example) on the less wealthy, less urbanized countries (Schimmelfennig et al., 2005).

In my case, the implementation of the European structural and investment funds can be described in terms of Europeanization. The funds are developed in relations between the EU and the member states (bidirectional), and in Sweden the regional level is highly involved when formulating the outlines of the funds (uploading) from which regional and local actors later on may apply for funding (download.). Hence, projectification can be argued to also be or contribute to processes of Europeanization at the same time as Europeanization contributes to projectification. In my case, however, I regard the EU as just one of several sources feeding into processes of projectification.

## Projectification as the increasing reliance on projects and the project logic

In addition to the three historical developments described above, there is perhaps a fourth development bringing the previous three together—that of the research field of projectification.

Projectification was a phenomenon that was first developed in a private sector context. It has been studied in the car manufacturing industry, the chemical industry, construction, and the steel industry (for overview: Aubry & Lenfle, 2012). These similar studies show how project management evolved from technical matters, tools and methods for individual projects toward more strategic aspects of the organizations (Morris & Jamieson, 2004). While the concept often is interpreted as referring to the increasing number of projects, it has also been argued that projectification is a central discursive theme in contemporary society, and “increasingly relevant for the understanding of almost any aspect of the contemporary economy” (Packendorff & Lindgren, 2014:7; see also Fogh Jensen et al., 2016; Fogh Jensen, 2013; Cicmil, et al., 2009).

The coining of the word projectification is often attributed to Christophe Midler, who studied the transformation of Renault “from



individual function or departmental logic to collective project management logic” (Aubury & Lenfie, 2012:687). Midler (1993; 1995) refers to this transformation as nothing less than a “management revolution” at Renault and it is something that, according to him, occurred over a period of more than 30 years, beginning in the early 1960s.

At first (1960-1970), projects at Renault were initiated within functional units and informally coordinated, but later (1970-1988) they were centralized in order to be coordinated more explicitly. In the late 1980s, Renault entered a period of project empowerment and autonomy, and the beginning of 1990s marked the transformation of the firm’s permanent processes: “the whole organization, traditionally seen as very stable and permanent, has now shifted in order to make projects and functions complement one another” (Aubury & Lenfie, 2012:687). At Renault, there was a belief that “project management is not a package that can be bought from the shelf” (Midler, 1993:114<sup>11</sup>). On the contrary, “knowledge must be collective so a common and coherent project culture can emerge” (ibid.).

Midler identifies several organizational challenges resulting from projectification. Perhaps the most significant was the adaptation of the rest of the organization and its supply networks (the environment) to the new “projectified” structures. Projectification is, following Midler’s argument, both a transformation of activities into specific projects, and a process of environmental adaptation.

Building further on Midler’s reasoning, and using an institutional logic perspective introduced more thoroughly in the following chapter, I will argue for the existence of three different but interrelated conceptualizations of local government projectification. My conceptualizations acknowledge earlier research on projectification as a growing reliance on project organizations as well as the adaptation of its surrounding organizational structures. I argue that local government, however, not only adapts to specific projects, but to the project logic present and available to act upon. Projectification then, is both an increasing use of projects, and also a growing reliance upon the logic associated with projects, which includes the capacity to handle future project activities on the organizational as well as the individual level.

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<sup>11</sup> Translation from French to English by Monique Aubry and Sylvain Lenfe, 2012.

## Summary

Several more or less connected events appear to have influenced the growing reliance on projects in the public sector. We saw a decline in the interest in bureaucracy, from practitioners and researchers alike, in the 1980s, and the concept of bureaucracy transformed from a set of principles lending themselves to empirical investigation to be more of a stagnant idea about a hierarchical and inflexible organizational form (Styhre, 2007). The public sector was viewed as inefficient, burdened with inflexible procedures, and in need of something other than bureaucracy—something signalling flat hierarchies, teamwork, networking, and flexibility. Reform packages emphasizing decentralized structures and performance measurement brought efficiency, results orientation and value for money to the agendas of Western public administrations (Hood, 1991;1995). Subsequently, in the early 2000s, ideas of a growing complexity in public sector demanding horizontal governance arrangements, partnerships, joined-up governments, but also trust and transparency emerged (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011; Dunleavy et al., 2006). Throughout the time of this decreasing interest in bureaucracy and reforms aimed at overcoming “bureaucratic pathologies,” there has been an increasing use of projects and a growing reliance on the project logic. NPM and NPG reforms resonate well with the ideals, practices and language often associated with project organizations and project management. I argue that these phenomena (NPM, NPG and the project logic) are interrelated and mutually beneficial. Public sector projects have come to imply flexibility, innovation and something post-bureaucratic.

Projects as organizational solutions to various problems, however, also have a long tradition in areas such as engineering and technology. This tradition has left a heritage clearly influencing globally-recognized project models (ISO, PMBOOK), project management courses around the world, and project management practices in which control, technocratic planning, execution and reporting tools are focused on more than the flexible and innovative characteristics of the projects (see Räsänen & Linde, 2004; Hodgson, 2004). This duality of the project makes it even more attractive. A project can be regarded as a device delivering both “controllability and unpredictability,” promising a solution to clearly defined objectives, plans of how to reach them, and techniques for how to evaluate them, at the same time as it can be argued

to deliver innovation and organizational change (see Sahlin, 1996; Sahlin-Andersson, 2002).

The EU is a great example of an institution promoting projects as organizational solutions to various problems. The EU also encompasses the contradictory sets of attributes of innovation, flexibility and a break with traditional bureaucratic ideals alongside those supporting control, standard operating procedures and hierarchical structures. The EU and its many project funds are an important driving factor in the proliferation and diffusion of not just projects and project ideas, but the project logic as well.

I have thus described three historical developments that are important to our understanding of contemporary public-sector projectification: the connections between the increasing use of projects and public management reforms; the historical legacy of the project as developed in the US military and space programs; and the EU as a precursor in terms of organizing via projects and the implementation of project-funding systems.

When coining the phrase projectification, Midler (1995) described the transition of ordinary activities into project activities, and how that forced the rest of the organization and its supply networks to adapt to these new projectified structures, creating a tension between ordinary activities and project activities. Many writings on projectification following Midler's work, however, have focused on the increasing number of projects within a firm, specific industry or organizational field, and given little consideration to the adaptation of the environment. Inspired by Midler, and using my empirical investigations (covered in chapters 5-7) I propose that local government projectification encompasses:

- The use of projects in addition to ordinary activities to do something the organization would not have done otherwise. These are often externally funded projects.
- The transformation of ordinary activities into project activities, meaning parts of, or entire organizations, being transformed into temporary project units. These may be externally or internally funded projects.
- The adaptation, not just to a set of projects, but also to the project logic on an individual, organizational, and institutional level. This includes mobilizing and organizing local government to handle present and future application procedures with competing project

ideas, implementing project management techniques, employing and/or training project managers, and the use of project-related language.

The study of local government projectification, therefore, needs to consider not just specific, well-defined projects, but ideals, ideas and practices associated with projects and project management—i.e. the project logic.

# Translations of institutional logics

In the previous chapter, I described how Western societies underwent reforms that placed concepts such as results orientation and value for money onto the agendas of public administrations. During this period, we also witnessed an increased reliance on project organizations, a development sometimes referred to as projectification. Building further on the works of Midler (1995) and his studies of projectification at Renault, and by embracing the notion of a broader perspective on projectification (Packendorff & Lindgren, 2014), I proposed that research on local government projectification should include more than the specific projects. Such research ought to embrace processes in the project environment in which institutions, organizations, and individuals adapt to, or are encouraged to change in accordance with, not just the projects, but also the principles coming with and surrounding the projects. Project work in local government may be organized as additions to ordinary work, but it may also be activities performed instead of ordinary work, or routines performed using project techniques and project models or even regular budgets described using a vocabulary inspired by project management. The consequences from these diverse uses of projects and project-related activities may be very different, but may all be regarded as processes of projectification.

To analyze such organizational processes of change, neo-institutional theory has introduced the concept of institutional logics (Friedland & Alford, 1991). Institutional logics refer to the belief systems and related practices that predominate in an organizational field (Scott, 2014), thus offering guidance as to appropriate and legitimate behavior. Studies of institutional logics analyze the processes through which logics govern action, how logics provide opportunities and constraints, but also insights into institutional change through competition between, or through the coexistence of several, institutional logics (Lindberg, 2014). Studies of institutional logics have focused mainly on the field level, and often fixated on one dominant, or two competing, logics, and paid little attention to the organizational level and how several logics translate into, or are acted upon in, practice (see Greenwood et al., 2011). As a consequence, those studies:

...do not contribute to our understanding of how logics work in practice; in what ways logics compete or co-mingle, how people act upon them, and what consequences this has in practice (Lindberg, 2014:486).

Future research, in other words, should appreciate that a multiplicity of logics is at play. Greenwood and his co-authors (2011) call upon researchers to be more explicit about the justifications for which logics are incorporated into the analysis. These calls and suggestions are tackled in this chapter, and are something I try to respond to throughout the thesis.

In this chapter, I describe local government practices as consisting of several “co-mingling” belief systems, languages and related practices—i.e., different logics. To a varying degree, local government practices correspond to a political logic, a bureaucratic logic, and a market logic. In terms of projectification, however, these logics are influenced by a logic of growing importance: the project logic, which competes with, complements, or collides with various aspects of the other logics. My point of departure is the micro-level day-to-day work of local government, and how the logics are acted upon and translated into practice by civil servants, managers and politicians on a daily basis. The logics are also inscribed in documents and policies, and manifested in the ways in which local government is organized. Inspired by Actor Network Theory (ANT), I use the concept of translation to make sense of the interplay between logics and how they translate into different kinds of practices.

This chapter aims to describe the institutional logic perspective, theories of translation and present the local government logics used in this thesis to describe processes of projectification.

## Institutional logics and organizational practices

Institutional logic is a field-level concept, referring to organizational fields described by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) as sets of organizations that constitute a recognized area of institutional life, such as academia, health care, or emergency services. The concept of institutional logic was first introduced by Friedland and Alford (1991), who conceptualized Western society as an inter-institutional system comprising “the capitalist market, bureaucratic state, democracy, nuclear family, and Christian religion” (p. 323). They emphasized

that each is associated with a distinctive “institutional logic” (Greenwood et al., 2011:321).

Society is—according to Friedland and Alford—made up of several institutional logics that “are interdependent and yet also contradictory” (1991:250), meaning that several institutional logics are “available,” and possibly often in conflict. Institutional logics have been used to describe and analyze “how to interpret organizational reality, what constitutes appropriate behavior, and how to succeed” (Thornton, 2004:70) within the confines of a specific field.

Studies have emphasized the co-existence of different logics, and institutional change is often explained as a movement from one dominant logic to another. Some argue that logics are in conflict, or that there is a struggle between different logics within the same field (see Purdy & Gray, 2009; Dunn & Jones, 2010), while others show that organizational fields can hold several logics at the same time without them competing or resulting in conflict (Lindberg, 2014; Pache & Santos, 2010; Reay & Hinings, 2009).

As argued above, much attention is directed at the field level, and less recognition has been given to the organizational level, though some studies “embrace the nestedness of field-level logics” (Greenwood et al., 2011:322). This “nestedness” implies vertical complexity (several levels interplay: macro-, meso-, micro-) as well as horizontal complexity (several logics at play in the same field). Greenwood et al. argue that “any attempt to understand complexity at the organizational level should take into account field-level processes” (ibid.). They continue to argue that a logic might very well be represented within an organization, but what matters for the logic to function as a source of organizational change is “the thickness of the ties” between organization members and field-level actors, or activities such as conferences, club memberships, training programs etc. In this regard, project management associations (PMI, IMPA), project models (Gant, PERT, GERT), project funding systems (the EU), standards (PMBOK, ISO), conferences, journals, and project methodology training programs are important influences on local government practices, and the stronger the connections between these actors and activities “the more likely the logic will insinuate itself into the organization” (Greenwood et al., 2011:342-343).

Hence, institutional logics carry meaning, but meaning also arises through social interaction in concrete settings (Hallett & Ventresca, 2006). I embrace Binder’s (2007) idea of the organization as not “merely the

instantiation of environmental, institutional logics ‘out there’... where workers, seamlessly enact preconscious scripts valorized in the institutional environment” (p. 551). Instead, she argues, organizations are places where people and groups “make sense of, and interpret, institutional vocabularies of motive, and act on those interpretations” (ibid.). Organizations then, are places where institutional logics—in combination with local, embedded meanings—produce a variety of local practices. They are places where employees gather and interpret information and make decisions “that sometimes depart from official policy, but also sometimes embrace institutional logics for all variety of reasons, and in all variety of ways” (ibid.).

### **Institutional logics as policy instruments**

I am inspired by the instrumentation approach, according to which it is possible to identify different levels of observations within the logics. A policy instrument “constitutes a device that is both technical and social, that organizes specific social relations between the state and those it is addressed to, according to the representations and meanings it carries” (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2007:4). Lascoumes and Le Galès distinguish between three levels of observations:

1. The “instrument”—a type of social institution at the macro-level.
2. The “technique”—a concrete device at the meso-level that operationalizes the instrument.
3. The “tool”—a micro device at micro-level within a technique.

Very similar to the institutional logic perspective, policy instruments

...determine the way in which the actors are going to behave; they create uncertainties about the effects of the balance of power; they will eventually privilege certain actors and interests and exclude others; they constrain the actors while offering them possibilities; they drive forward a certain representation of problems ... [they] partly determine what resources can be used and by whom. Like any institution, instruments allow forms of collective action to stabilize, and make the actors’ behavior more predictable and probably more visible (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2007:9).



Using the policy instrumentation terminology to describe the levels of observation in relation to the project logic, *the instrument* is the more abstract notion of “a belief system” in which projects are thought of as innovative, effective and/or rationalistic devices of control. *The techniques* are then the project funding systems and the project organizations, while *the tools*, at the micro level, are project methodology, project models and the project vocabulary used in practice.

While the institutional logic perspective helps us sort out different logics relevant to local government practice (horizontal complexity), the policy instrumentation perspective gives us some hands-on techniques to differentiate between the levels of observation within the logics (vertical complexity).

### **Institutional logics in organizational practices**

For research on institutional logics, focus on organizational practices is important because logics only have effects in concrete settings through the enactment of practices (Thornton et al., 2012:132). Organizational practices are also continuously subject to change, and to zoom in on the dynamics of practices is therefore imperative to understanding stability and change in institutional logics (ibid.). When I speak of practices, I refer to the practice of doing and saying something in a specific place and time. Practices are not, as Nicolini (2009) argues, objects, nor are they in the heads of people or stored in routines or programs (p. 122). Focusing on practices is thus taking the social and material doing of something as the main focus of the inquiry (ibid.).

The studies that examine the organizational level show more nuanced, and less overt ways of managing rival logics (e.g. Maguire et al., 2004; Pache & Santos, 2011; Reay & Hinings, 2009). Battilana (2006) showed how actors supporting a non-dominant logic held neither authority nor positions of high status, enabling them to openly challenge the dominant logic. Instead

...they drew on their knowledge of the context to develop change strategies and make incremental advances toward their overall targets. Institutional change was driven by individual agency operating somewhat “under the radar” but over time resulting in new field-level logics. Rivalry between competing logics was managed covertly, and change strategies were successful largely because more powerful actors did not recognize the potential shift in institutional logics until it was too late to stop it. These studies draw attention to the possibility of a

slowly emerging dominant logic and suggest that the transition period is important to understand (Reay & Hinings, 2009:632).

The idea of logics operating “under the radar” in organizational practices reinforces my case for studying projectification (as a Trojan horse) in local government practices through several co-existing logics. As described in the introductory chapter, when local government launches projects to tackle unemployment or social exclusion they expect, or hope for, improvement in the employment rates or the reduction of social exclusion. But, what about consequences coming from the organizational and institutional principles of the project logic? Consequences that perhaps are unintended, not calculated for or even recognized— “latent consequences” to use Merton’s language (1968)?

Even though there might be changes in the dominant logic at the field level, individuals or groups of individuals at an organizational level might still give “the appearance of accepting the new logic but continue to act in accordance with the old logic” (Reay & Hinings, 2009:632).

Some researchers studying competing institutional logics at an organizational level describe these sites as hybrid organizations (Pache & Santos, 2011; Battilana & Dorado, 2010). Pache and Santos (2013) define a hybrid organization as an organization that incorporates elements from different institutional logics. Local government suits that definition in that there are several institutional logics that are available to act upon. The logics may also be acted upon differently and sometimes in rather subtle ways. Pache and Santos (2011) found a pattern in their study of work integration social enterprises that they also refer to as a “Trojan horse,” in which “organizations that entered the work integration field with low legitimacy... strategically incorporated elements from the social welfare logic in an attempt to gain legitimacy and acceptance” (p. 972.). An organization or a unit within local government, therefore, might adopt or appropriate their work in accordance to a logic that appears to be more legitimate or accepted. In terms of projectification, this might manifest itself in organizations initiating projects because something is a fashionable organizational model, or civil servants and politicians adopting a project language to gain legitimacy or trust in regard to certain issues or in certain arenas.

## Local government logics

In local government practices “there are multiple logics at play, and how these relate to each other, and are acted upon, varies from situation to situation” (Lindberg, 2014:486).

### **The bureaucratic logic**

Swedish local government organizations are built upon, or heavily inspired by a bureaucratic logic, described by Styhre (2007:6) as the outcome of “a rule-governed process of organizing complex undertakings”. The logic of bureaucracy is characterized by routines, stability, efficiency, predictability and transparency (see Poulsen, 2009; Ellström, 2009; Fisker, 1995). The idea of public sector bureaucratic organizations corresponds to a great deal with that of Weber’s legal-rational model, which describe bureaucracy as hierarchical, rule-enforcing, impersonal in the application of laws, and constituted by members with specialized technical knowledge of rules and procedures (Weber, 1948). A particularly good example of the application of bureaucratic logic in local government and the public sector in general are budgeting practices. Budgeting is used as a planning device, to allocate monetary resources, define whether organizations are efficient and effective, and hold managers and politicians accountable (Wällstedt & Almqvist, 2017). Budgeting practices also appear to be rather resilient to change, and have stood strong against reforms and change initiatives. When innovations are put into place they are forced to adapt to the budget process—to the bureaucratic logic—rather than vice versa, demonstrating the power of bureaucratic logic (*ibid.*).

In relation to projects, the logic of bureaucracy is often represented by “permanent” or ordinary organizations, while the projects are viewed as “temporary” organizations. To organize in project form is described as a way to avoid “all the classic problems of bureaucracy” (Packendorff & Lindgren, 2014: 7). In local government, bureaucracy stands for stability and durability, and projects are often used as temporary experiments in order to develop specific methods, tools or new routines that are intended to develop and change local government organizations somehow.

## The market logic

As described in chapter 2, in the late 1970s, Western societies began to introduce a whole range of “new” ideas and reforms advocating results orientation and value for money as key public administration management concepts. The reforms, subsequently known as NPM, consist of several conflicting elements, but the common core is the marketization and corporatization of public administration inspired by *the firm* as an organizational model (Hall, 2012; Abrahamsson & Agevall, 2010). This means to organize public administration like any other company in a market of different public-sector services, and to use management techniques from the private sector to do so. This is what I call the market logic, a logic that emphasizes the accumulation of personal—as well as organizational—wealth and income. Market logic is based on the idea that citizens—often referred to as the clients—should be the ones making the final decision regarding services, and their criteria of quality is the guiding reference point. The market logic is also based on ideas of competition—between ideas, employees, organizations and funding, for instance (see Nyberg, 2017:82). In countries where the adaptation to NPM have progressed a great deal (New Zealand, the UK, the Nordic countries) the market logic is also more relevant (Skelcher & Rathgeb, 2014).

Examples of practices associated with market logic are outsourcing, and the “expansion of public authorities’ purchasing of goods and services through competitive tendering” (Hansson, 2010). The use of procurement is not a Swedish phenomenon, but, according to Hansson, an increasingly widespread practice throughout Europe (*ibid.*). Procurement is also an example in which the political logic is somewhat restrained due to the imperative of competition as characteristic of market logic.

Regarding the market logic and the relationship to project organizations, I described in chapter 2 how the increasing focus on performance and (financial) efficiency that is significant for market logic also resonates well with ideas of project organization.

## The political logic

Swedish local governments are also governed by a political logic, a logic that is more change-oriented, and perhaps even flexible, than the logic of bureaucracy. Political logic is characterized by democratic ideals, decisiveness, and the ability

to take action (see Larsson & Bäck, 2008). Moreover, it is also a logic that encourages the visible aspects of change and development efforts. It is also, however, a logic of conflicting entities in which different parties may want completely different things (*ibid.*).

While bureaucratic logic encapsulates a perception of time as more or less infinite, and the project logic as temporary, political logic is more closely related to specific time frames regulated by elections. In Sweden, elections are held every fourth year, and political logic may influence politicians and civil servants differently depending on whether an election is on the horizon, or has just been held. Political logic is also, through different elections, bound to several political institutional levels, such as the European, the national, the regional and the local levels.

The notion of power is perhaps more explicit in political logic compared to the other logics, and more closely associated with a specific type of actor: politicians. Actions (and decisions) taken at any level in local government in Sweden have to, to some degree, directly or indirectly please the city council and fulfil the overarching political objectives of the municipality. (Not least because they are responsible for decisions taken regarding the budgets.) As will be evident in chapter 6, for instance, there is an eagerness to use, or adapt to, the political logic when organizing social investment activities, in order to not be terminated. The visible character of the political logic then comes into play as well, since the social investment activities—especially the initiation of the work—must be made visible.

There is a body of research discussing de-politicization and how the logic of politics is losing ground to other logics in Western societies. Burnham (2001), for instance, describes a move toward managerialism and away from elected politicians (Burnham, 2001). In fact, much of the critique against NPM has been due to the way the reforms encourage the de-politicization of public administration. Contrary to such arguments, Fred and Hall (2017) regard projects in local government as “not only task- and goal-oriented, but also (perhaps even primarily) politically and strategically oriented,” which would imply politicization rather than de-politicization (p. 189).

## **The project logic**

On a more practical level than the bureaucratic, political, and market logics, the project logic encompasses two almost contradictory features: one innovative,

flexible feature expressed as a break with traditional, bureaucratic ideals and practices, and the other supporting control, standard operating procedures and hierarchical structures. Sahlin (1996) describes the former in terms of *projects as process* and the latter in terms of *projects as form*. Also described in chapter 2, and an important part of the project logic, is the temporary character of its nature, and the project logic's conception of time is also what separates it most from the other logics.

The time conception of the permanent, bureaucratic, organization is cyclical—phenomena are repeated, recurring time and time again (Burrell, 1992), whereas the project follows a linear time conception leading from a starting-point to termination (Ibert, 2004: 1530). These different conceptions of time may impact the organizations in several respects. The future is framed in terms of strategies and goals, in which the present is viewed as a passing phase on the way from the past to the future, while ordinary activities are characterized by repetition and routine with more or less the same activities being repeated every day. Ellström (2009) describes this as organizations relying on two overarching and dependent logics, in which the ordinary activities are often colored by a logic of production (pursuing efficiency, stability and fast results), while strategies, rhetorical formulations and plans for the future are in line with a logic enforcing ideas of development (reflection, risk-taking and innovation). In a public sector context, projects have often become associated with the logic of development, but, as discussed in chapter 2 (see 2.2; Hodgson, 2004) the project logic is also, at least historically, connected to ideas of production, control and fast results.

In a linear time conception, organizational outcomes and impacts are already projected in the planning phase of a project, into the future. This future-oriented perspective, which characterizes contemporary Western social life as well as reform politics, has fostered concepts and activities that anticipate conditions that have not yet occurred, but are still able to control the activities of people and legitimize political acts (Koselleck, 2004: 160). Thus, in a projectified organization, individual public administrators acting as project leaders become directly subordinate to the linear, strategic purposes of their (political and/or managerial) peers (Fred & Hall, 2017).

Project management associations advocate project logic, and it permeates conferences and professional and academic journals. In addition to the existence of a political rhetoric and bureaucratic language, there is also a project language with project-related vocabulary that is used to describe and

make sense of local government work. The language connected to the project logic is a project management “filter through which one understands, interprets and describes one’s world” (Rombach & Zapata, 2010:26).

In sum, the logics are in several respects in conflict with one other, for instance when it comes to what is regarded as quality, or how the result of local government should be assessed, or regarding who has the potential to influence local government practices. Even so, they are, to varying degrees, part of local government practices.

**Fig. 2 Logics in local government – a summary**

|                              | Project                                      | Political   | Bureaucratic  | Market   |
|------------------------------|--|---|---|--|
| <b>Instrument</b><br>(macro) | Innovation, visibility, rationality, control | Democratic accountability, governing, ‘public values’       | Predictability, efficiency, organizational accountability | Financial efficiency, outcome orientation, “survival of the fittest” |
| <b>Technique</b><br>(meso)   | Projects, project funding systems            | Political institutions and organizations (the city council) | Bureaucratic organizational model, hierarchy              | Procurement, outsourcing, competition                                |
| <b>Tool</b><br>(micro)       | Project methodology, project models          | Decision making, budgeting                                  | Rules, regulations, routines                              | Project funding system   |

### Translating multiple, co-existing local government logics

In their day-to-day work, local government employees continually face situations that call for various actions to be taken; actions that are guided by beliefs, regulations, norms and institutions, which are described here as institutional logics. The logics are to be understood as coexisting—competing, one might say—for attention, but they need to be acted upon to be relevant to practices (Lindberg, 2014). This means that the logics do not exist per se, but must be performed, and are thus continuously re-constructed in practice. The institutional logic perspective can be used as an approach to seek to resolve the antipathy between traditional structuralist approaches that emphasize the external environment as an explanatory factor for organizational action, and approaches that are more centered around actors, i.e., explaining social phenomena in terms of individual actions (Lundquist, 1987). I regard institutional logics as sets of expectations regarding social relations and behavior (Goodrick & Reay, 2011), but individual and organizational actors may also

choose to act—or not—upon a logic. Friedland and Alford (1987) exemplify through their study of how workers' rights groups act upon and promote a democratic logic as a basis for workplace relations—"workers attempt to redefine the social relations of production as defined by democratic rights of citizenships rather than contractual property rights" (p. 257). Another example is when the former US Vice President Gore invoked market logic, seeking to reform the state:

Effective, entrepreneurial governments insist on customer satisfaction. They listen carefully to their customers....They restructure their basic operations to meet customers' needs. And they use market dynamics such as competition and customer choice to create incentives that drive their employees to put customers first (Gore, 1993:6).

This is also where processes of translation become interesting. To study institutional logics in practice I have turned to Actor Network Theory and the notion of translation: how logics are spread and changed (Czarniawska & Sevón, 2005). A translation perspective on institutional logics suggests that ideas and logics are always under construction, and therefore necessarily unfinished. The institutional logics are a set of ideas or practices that are translated into different settings and practices. In this respect, the different logics offer

...ways of imagining organizations, their inner lives and how they are to be coordinated. They also attempt to establish that language and its ways of thinking and acting as necessary, normal and natural. In the process, other ways of thinking, acting, calculating and organizing are displaced (Clarke et al., 2015:97).

However, Czarniawska and Sevón (2012b) also argue that translation changes not just what is translated, but that processes of translation also have an impact on those performing the translation, the actors turning the logics into practices. The institutional literature emphasizes that actors "represent" and give voice to institutional logics (Pache & Santos, 2010). Actors are thus advocates or spokespersons for logics and "represent and import into an organization the meanings and norms of logics to which they have been primarily exposed" (Greenwood et al., 2011:342). This becomes apparent when talking to



employees with a specific profession, like social workers or teachers, or when confronting a consultant advocating a specific organizational model.

According to Røvik (2000), actors who translate are deliberately seeking to adjust the institutional logic to their own circumstances and/or for their own purposes. Söderholm and Wihlborg (2013) describe how actors in the process of translation are not passive links “simply [diffusing] a fixed set of ideas and practices” (p. 268), but interpret and reinterpret change. The mediating role associates the actors with some autonomy to influence how the different logics are translated into practice, which also leaves them in a position of power.

It should be noted that not just human actors are of importance in this perspective, but also “material arrangements, such as objects and technologies,...may represent institutionalized logics in practice” (Lindberg, 2014:488). In my case, these non-human actors might be written rules, project standards, or project models.

### **Decoupling, compromising and competing**

In the research on institutional logics there are three main theories of how organizations with multiple institutional logics deal with the different logics: *decoupling*, *compromising*, and *combining*. *Decoupling* studies have a long tradition in institutional theory, and argue that “organizations symbolically endorse practices prescribed by one logic while actually implementing practices promoted by another logic” (Pache & Santaos, 2013:974; see also Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Westphal & Zajac, 2001). In terms of projects, decoupling may mean that the innovative aspects of project management are endorsed by organizations rhetorically, but not carried out in practice. These issues are discussed in the implementation literature as tensions between the projects and the permanent organizations. Johansson (et al., 2007) conclude in their study based on human service organizations in Sweden, that “implementation depends on how the distinction between the project and permanent organization is originally defined,” meaning that projects are either organized “to accomplish innovation, or to achieve successful implementation (p. 457). The more decoupled a project is from the permanent organization, the more innovative the solution is permitted to be, but at the same time, the more innovative a solution, the less likely it is to be implemented successfully.

*Compromising* is another theory, although not as well documented as decoupling, which proposes that organizations “enact institutional prescriptions

in a slightly altered form, crafting an acceptable balance between the conflicting expectations of external constituents” (Pache & Santaos, 2013:975; see also Scott, 2014; Oliver, 1991). Regarding projectification, an example of compromising might be when local governments want to organize parts of their organization as projects but find it difficult to do so entirely. Hence, they end up with projects that are not thoroughly organized as projects (e.g., organized without a project manager, with no project team, or the project is never-ending) or end up being permanent organizations that enforce a project model or define their activities using project management language. As an example, Hasselbladh et al., (2008) show in their study of Total Quality Management (TQM) that despite implementation failure, managers and groups of employees were mobilized to partake in the practices of TQM and their joint effort did in fact influence how the organization came to perceive itself: the TQM logic outlived the projects.

The most recent contribution to studies of multiple logics is the theory of *combining competing logics*, which creates opportunities for organizations to draw from the broader repertoire of behaviors prescribed by different logics (see Greenwood et al., 2011; Reay & Hinings, 2009; Pache & Santaos, 2013). The competing perspective suggests that different logics do not have to be adopted and acted upon in their entirety, but may function as source of inspiration. Characteristics from one logic might blend with another logic. From this perspective, the project logic might be compatible with the political logic, regarding visibility or the eagerness to take action, for instance, whereas the project logic might be more incompatible with the professional logic.

The combining competing logics perspective acknowledges several logics, and allows them to co-exist and also be acted upon to varying degrees, something that I find helpful when discussing projectification. Even though some authors argue that we now live in the project society (Fogh Jensen, 2012; Lundin et al., 2015) with the project logic governing almost all aspects of our lives, the study of public sector projectification has to acknowledge the other logics as well, since they constitute the institutional complex of the public sector. The logics influence local government organizations, however, and processes of projectification may be observed both in the increasing reliance upon project logic in practice, but also in processes in which other logics transform or adapt to the project logic. The former indicates organizational change, and the latter institutional change. It is particularly important,

according to Reay and Hinings (2009), to understand “the transition period” of “the possibility of a slowly emerging dominant logic” (p. 632).

For me, the concepts of decoupling, compromising, and combining institutional logics are analytical tools to make sense of the relationship between co-existing logics and how they translate into practices.

## Actors of importance for the logics

With an institutional logic perspective on local government projectification, several different actors are relevant, and each actor may contribute to or advocate for a specific logic while at the same time endorsing several other logics as well. Political logic is most easily associated with politicians, for instance. Civil servants, however, may also use or adapt to political logic, and politicians may use or adapt to bureaucratic logic. Project logic is, of course, easy to associate with project managers and project employees.

While bureaucratic logic encourages employees in local government to act in accordance with “public ethos” prescribing the beliefs, norms, and ethical rules of the public sector (or to act as *guardians of democracy* in Lundquist’s words) (1998) the project logic encompasses completely different beliefs and norms for civil servants to act upon. The project manager has been described as a *jack of all trades*, someone who is decent at many things, rather than an expert in one particular thing (Gaddis, 1959, quoted in Packendorff, 1995:323). Löfgren & Poulsen (2013), in their study of public organization recruitment efforts in Denmark between 1982-2011, show how project management, as a skill in demand, grew during this period, and by the end of 2010 was “perceived as a natural element in organizing governmental work” (Löfgren & Poulsen, 2013:75).

Most local government actors probably do not really think of themselves as using or adapting to specific logics, they just do their job with the resources they have, and these resources happen to be associated with different logics. Those who can appropriate the institutional logics, however, may move with greater ease through its processes: “they know what to expect, they can imagine how things work, and they have the language to advocate for themselves” (see McCoy 2006:119, on institutional discourse).

Røvik (2000) describes how different actors have different capacities for translating institutional logics into practice. Some actors are clearly advocates

and spokespersons for a specific logic. Kingdon (2011) describes one such actor, the policy entrepreneur: an individual who invests time, energy, resources and sometimes even money in a certain issue. Policy entrepreneurs are “advocates for solutions and look for current problems to which to attach their pet solutions” (p. 123). Olsson and Hysing (2012) discuss a similar type of actor, but use the term “insider activist” to describe an individual engaged in civil society networks and organizations “who holds a formal position within public administration, and who acts strategically from inside public administration to change government policy and action in line with a personal value commitment” (Olsson & Hysing, 2012:2).

In relation to project organization, policy entrepreneurs and/or insider activists can be described as project champions<sup>12</sup> i.e. committed individuals working hard to reach specific goals. These individuals are experts at acquiring funding and coordinating support for their solution: their project. In terms of projectification, these characteristics of the project champion are skills that are disseminated, and encouraged, across local government organizations. As mentioned earlier, Löfgren and Poulsen (2013) describe how project management has become a term used to describe almost all forms of work-life in modern bureaucracy, and therefore become an in-demand personnel ability and skill.

## The languages of the logics

With a logic comes a specific language, and “with a language comes not only words and expressions, but ways of thinking, values and views of things—and they matter” (Rombach & Zapata, 2010:7-8). Different logics can be associated with different languages, and civil servants might need to translate from one language to another in order to be fully understood or listened to (see Norlin, 2010). It is, as such, important to take the use of language into account when analyzing co-existing logics because “when people talk differently, what they see is different, what they think and do are different, and the consequences are different” (Weick, 2009: 29). To understand the processes of how organizations become “project-like,” we need to understand how employees talk about, describe and make sense of what they are doing.

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<sup>12</sup> The literal translation of the Swedish word *eldsjäl* is “soul of fire”.

## Summary

To analyze and understand institutional and organizational change in terms of projectification I have turned to the institutional logic perspective proclaiming the coexisting of several available logics that civil servants, managers and politicians act upon on a daily basis. Local government employees are influenced by and translates into practices the norms, beliefs, languages and routines associated with a bureaucratic logic, a market logic, a political logic, and a project logic. Projectification is here thought of as the growing importance of the project logic, something that can take on many different forms. Local government may choose to engage in more projects (increasing number of projects), but they may also transform or adopt their ordinary activities to the project logic.

Project-specific features may enhance some aspect of the other logics in local government practices while obstructing others. Project logic may, for instance, enhance parts of the market logic (results orientation, “value for money”); it may boost the visible character of the political logics (showing decisiveness and the ability to act), or the need for transparency in the bureaucratic logic (showing who is responsible for what). On the other hand, the innovative characteristics of the project logic seem to clash with all other logics.

In other words, there are horizontal tensions between different logics, but there are also vertical tensions to consider. Inspired by the policy instrumentation perspective we can observe each logic at three integrated levels. There is the “instrument” at the macro-level, a social institution at which we find the more abstract notions of the logic as a belief system. Then we have the “technique” at the meso-level, a concrete device that operationalizes the instrument. In terms of project logic, this is where we find concrete projects and project- funding systems. Lastly there are the “tools,” micro devices within the techniques; in my case, this would be project methodology and project models. Some aspects, such as language, tie these levels together, since the project language can be observed at all levels.

Associated with these horizontal and vertical levels are different actors or groups of actors advocating for “their” logic. Project logic, for example, is endorsed by international project management associations and international as well as national project standards and models, but is also advocated for through

institutions such as the EU, and at the same time encouraged by regional and local consultants, and put into practice by individual civil servants or politicians. From a translation perspective inspired by actor network theory, the actors are relevant because they are not just passive links acting upon fixed set of ideas. Instead, they are to be regarded as interpreting and reinterpreting the different logics while performing practices. This provides them with some autonomy to influence how the logics are translated into practice, which also leaves them in a position of power. The project logic, for example, could be used to tap into or enhance some specific features of the political logic. Some actors are better equipped than others to use or act upon different logics, and depending on which logic appears to be most attractive, different skills are needed. If project logic is of growing importance in local government, people skilled in using project logic, and people able to translate other logics into project-mode, will be sought after.

The logic perspective helps me analyze projectification as something not just associated with specific projects, but as activities embedded in an institutional complex that facilitate and support the project logic. To put it another way, the logic perspective allows me to talk about projectification regardless of whether or not there are projects.

# How to study the logics of local government projectification

In order to study the interplay of institutional logics and how they are acted upon and translated into different kind of practices, it is imperative to study civil servants, managers, politicians and organizational units at different levels, and preferably in-depth over some period of time. One must get close to practices to understand what these civil servants, managers and politicians do, why they do it, and what they do differently (if anything) when engaging in project activities. One also needs to consider organizational structures, strategies, plans and policies—how the municipality is organized and governed—to understand the setting in which processes of projectification might occur. Since my argument about local government projectification also goes beyond the specific municipal organization, I need to consider other local governments at the regional level, as well as the national and international levels.

In this chapter, I describe the methodological considerations taken into account throughout my research process, and how I have gathered empirical material and analyzed it in terms of local government projectification. I describe why Eslöv is a good case for studying local government projectification, and explain my reasons for “following” civil servants from Eslöv over a longer period. By maintaining a relationship with Eslöv throughout these years I have been able to study local government projectification up-close and in-depth. By following social-investment-related actors and actions (not just Eslöv-related activities) at the local, regional, and national levels, I have also been able to study projectification as a common local government phenomenon that is embedded in a multilevel institutional setting.

The overarching methodological approach described in this chapter is the institutional ethnographic approach described by Smith (1999) as “the investigation of empirical linkages among local settings of everyday life, organizations, and translocal processes of administration and governance” (in Devault & McCoy, 2006:15). This approach encourages beginning with the

experiences of individuals, through observations and interviews, to find and describe social processes that may have generalizing effects (ibid.). Institutional ethnography does not restrict the fieldwork or the analysis to organizational boundaries. Rather, it places the experiences and practices of individuals within a multilevel organizational and institutional setting in which actions taken at one site—in my case in the municipality of Eslöv—affect and are affected by the organizational and institutional environment. Empirically, this means that organizational actions taken in Eslöv are made sense of not only through my fieldwork in Eslöv, but in other municipalities and organizations and different kind of networks and actors with a relationship to Eslöv as well. Theoretically, the institutional logics presented in chapter 3 are viewed by the institutional ethnographer as a widely shared

way of knowing (measuring, naming, describing) states of affairs that render them actionable within institutional relations of purpose and accountability. Far more than “jargon,” these are conceptual systems, forms of knowledge that carry institutional purposes... (McCoy, 2006:118).

Institutional ethnography will be described throughout this chapter, since it concerns and influences all aspects of how I study the logics of local government projectification, from the selection of cases to my fieldwork techniques. For an institutional ethnographer, even the personal journey leading up to the research project is part of the ethnographic approach, since it influences the choosing of and access to research sites, and how research questions are posed and answered. I will therefore begin this chapter by introducing the reader to my journey, and how I ended up writing a thesis aiming to conceptualize local government projectification.

## Beginning with experience

Institutional ethnographies are rarely planned out fully in advance. Instead, the process of inquiry is rather like grabbing a ball of string, finding a thread, and then pulling it out.” (DeVault & McCoy, 2006:20)

My interest in projects and processes of projectification in local government goes back several years before entering the PhD program at Lund University. It started, as with many institutional ethnographers, with personal



experience (see Diamond, 2006:59). In the past, I worked as a local government project evaluator. After just a few years as an evaluator, I observed and discussed the same implementation failures and organizational learning problems repeatedly with project employees and “project owners.” The projects employees often argued that no one was interested in the results of their work and the “permanent” organizations initiating the projects argued that there was no way of incorporating the project results due to budget cycles, lack of resources, or difficult employment procedures, or that the timing was off. It appeared to make no difference whether or not the project produced positive results. Organizational transformation and change due to the projects were rare. The lack of implementation and organizational learning, however, did not seem to stop the initiation of new projects, but rather the opposite.

Sahlin-Andersson (1996) describes a similar experience in a chapter in one of the first books I read regarding projects and projectification: *Projektets paradoxer* [The Paradoxes of the Project]. In it, she argues that implementation failure does not necessarily change the way the projects are organized or the relationships between the temporary and permanent organizations, but instead increases the influx of projects. Sahlin (1996; 1991) describes a similar phenomenon in her study of 200 youth projects, in which the same project activities were repeated over and over again, and I have argued elsewhere that development projects in local governments “seldom is implemented in the permanent organization. Instead, projects tend to lead to new projects” (Forsell et al., 2013). This is paradoxical to say the least: organizations initiating more projects, while at the same time appearing to learn nothing from them. As an evaluator, this became evident when I was asked to evaluate what appeared to be the same—or very similar—projects repeatedly within the same local government organizations. As a result, my evaluation reports all started to look the same. This also, however, led me to think about all these projects and the perceived lack of effects: all these activities must have some kind of effect, I thought, and the organizations must learn something—but what, and how?

When I started the PhD program in Lund in 2012, I wanted to explore these paradoxes of project organizing that I encountered as an evaluator. During this period, I had recurrent conversations with a fellow PhD student, Josef Chaib, who also happened to work part time as a civil servant, in the municipality of Eslöv. He repeatedly referred to their organization and practices when I talked to him about my research interests. Josef introduced me to some of his coworkers and his manager in Eslöv. This manager later invited me to

hold a seminar for civil servants and politicians to discuss the prerequisites of project organizations and sustainable organizational effects: something I already knew quite well due to my background as an evaluator, but I had also begun reading up on public sector projects and projectification. At this seminar, I met several civil servants and politicians who I later came to interview and follow over the course of several years.

## Case selection: Why Eslöv?

Despite the rather haphazardly occurring events described above, Eslöv has turned out to be a great case for studying local government projectification. It is a somewhat average municipality in terms of its organization and the number of employees, and also in terms of its size, population, age, median income and unemployment rates (<http://www.ekonomifakta.se>, 2015). In that sense, it is a rather “typical” Swedish local government case (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). This, however, is not the main reason why I think it is a suitable case for the study of local government projectification. Rather, it is the fact of it being a typical Swedish municipality that has a seemingly exceptional interest in all sorts of issues regarding project organization. On the one hand Eslöv appears to be like any other Swedish municipality, but on the other, it appears to be rather extreme in its fascination with project organization. “Everybody talks about projects, even about stuff that is not a project, and that’s great”, as the city manager phrased it when I first interviewed her.

What initially captured my interest in Eslöv were three specific project-related features of their organization. *The first* was a specific “policy for externally funded development projects” in which the ambition to “constantly develop the municipal activities” through project and project methodology is stated (Eslöv project policy, 2014). In this policy, externally-funded projects are specified as being important organizational solutions for municipal development.

*The second* feature was a project model developed in collaboration with a consultant, the purpose of which was to guide and structure not only projects, but all kind of activities in all parts of the municipality. The idea of letting a project model guide not only specific projects but also other kind of activities resonated well with my idea of studying projectification as being something more than an increasing number of projects.

*The third* thing that caught my interest was the implementation of a social investment fund. Put simply, this is an internal municipal project-funding system to which local government employees may apply for funds to finance project ideas aimed at encouraging a perspective in which social policy is viewed as a long-term investment, not a cost. This intrigued me, since it appeared almost paradoxical to talk about long-term investments at the same time as using temporary (short-term) projects to achieve these long-term goals.

The social investment budget is interesting for several reasons. An in-house project model is used to implement the budget. The budget results in projects, and it is requested that these utilize the municipality's project model, and civil servants involved in those projects are strongly encouraged to take a project management course. Due to all of this, I saw a potential site in which the project logic appeared to be influential. Eslöv's social investment budget, however, is not something unique that is taking place on the fringes of local government practices. Social investment funds are a growing phenomenon: almost 100 local governments had one or more social investment funds by 2015, and approximately 60 municipalities were considering starting one (SKL, 2015). In addition to that is a wide range of conferences, seminars, courses and networks attracting local and regional government professionals and politicians all over Sweden. The social investment funds are also strongly connected to the wider social investment perspective advocated by the OECD, the EU and the World Bank (Wilson, 2014). This gives us a vast nexus of coordinated work processes and courses of action, all somewhat related to the project logic, in rather diverse sites with rather different kind of actors at different levels of society. Such an institutional complex cannot, of course, be studied and mapped out in its entirety, and that is not my objective. Inspired by the institutional ethnography approach, I instead see the social investment case as a great opportunity "to explore particular corners or strands within a specific institutional complex, in ways that make visible their points of connection with other sites and courses of action" (DeVault & McCoy, 2006:17). Hence, local practices and experiences in Eslöv are tied into, and shaped by, extended social relations or chains of action related to the project logic.

## The social investment action net and a case of local government projectification

The institutional ethnographic approach encourages me to study the experiences and practices of individuals as embedded in an organizational and institutional complex, and to do that I have turned to the concept of the *action net* (see Lindberg & Czarniawska, 2006). Even though I began with the organizational practices in Eslöv and their implementation of a social investment fund, I did not restrict my study to the organizational or geographical boundaries of Eslöv. Instead, I followed the actions of different social investment actors. The idea of the action net is to study organizing as an on-going process in which collective actions are connected to one another, “usually according to a pattern that is legitimate at a given time and in a given place” (Lindberg, 2014:489). These collective actions, however, are not necessarily performed within the boundaries of a specific organization, but may involve a great variety of networks, organizations and individuals. As a result, my fieldwork brought me not only to Eslöv, but also to a network of local governments that I followed as they went on field trips and attended conferences. As a result of the institutional ethnographic and action net approaches, I also conducted fieldwork in the municipalities of Örebro and Norrköping.

I started by contacting and meeting with civil servants involved in the social investment work in Eslöv. I participated in meetings and interviewed several of them regarding their work. I also “followed” these civil servants in their meetings with other civil servants from other municipalities and counties/regions, however, which allowed me further access to information about local government social investment work, and, consequently, project activities.

By follow, I mean the concrete action of the ethnographer. In my case, this has been a “lighter” version of shadowing, which is where the researcher literally follows a person or a group of people around, often for a longer period (Czarniawska, 2007). My procedure was to ask civil servants in Eslöv to invite me to any kind of meeting in which social investment projects, project models or anything related to projects were to be discussed. I began to be invited by some of them, and followed them to meetings, conferences and field trips. While ethnographers often zoom in on one principal site, I was guided by the actions of these civil servants and their meetings with other civil servants in Eslöv, as well as with civil servants and politicians from other municipalities or

public agencies, engaging in what Troullie and Tavory (2016) call “intersituational variation.” Troullie and Tavory argue that ethnographers all too easily assume that action in one situation translates to similar actions in another. Intersituational variations, however, in which the researcher follows the subjects to a variety of places, “broadens and deepens the researcher’s ethnographic account” (p. 1).

Through these meetings, I obtained access to a regional network—what the participants called a “thematic group”—meeting on a regular basis to discuss social investment issues. This network organized two field trips: one to Örebro and one to Norrköping. I was invited to both these field trips, and was able to both discuss with and later interview some of the representatives from these municipalities. Eslöv as well as the network and the municipal front runners described here are all part of a mutually influential institutional complex, so studying social investment practices in Eslöv means taking these actors and actions into account, as well.

During the time I followed the network, they organized one regional conference and participated in one national conference. At these conferences key actors, such as consultants, municipal front-runners and representatives from national authorities were invited to talk, and I was able to meet several of them, and later on also interview some of them. The conferences gave me an opportunity not just to listen to Eslöv present its social investment projects, but also to listen to a whole range of other municipalities presenting and discussing social investment work and related project activities.

The conferences are also good illustrations of what I mean by the Trojan horse of local government. Social investments are put forward, described and almost glorified at these events, but the structure to which all municipalities implementing a social investment fund adapt—the project—is not very explicit.

At these conferences, it became evident who is “important” and whom one should listen to regarding social investment funds, partly by listening to the presentations, but also by participating in the discussions during coffee breaks. The Swedish association of local authorities and regions (*Svenska Kommuner och Landsting* or SKL), for instance, was responsible for the national conference and was present at the regional conference handing out reports and pamphlets and presenting their own on-going development project. SKL was frequently referred to by various civil servants and politicians from different local governments during the presentations at these conferences and during the coffee breaks. Norrköping and Örebro were present at the national conference

displaying their work, but they were also referred to as front-runners several times at the regional conference by other municipalities. Another example of an important actor is Ingvar Nilsson, a Swedish professor of political economy and consultant, who over the last couple of years has traveled across the country holding lectures and seminars “selling” the idea of social investment and social investment funds. He participated in the regional conference, and has been referred to by all the municipalities that I have been in contact with when discussing important factors for the initiation of a social investment fund.

By following these actors and (some of) their actions, I have been able to “weave” a “social investment net” through which I have studied social investment work as a case of local government projectification that goes beyond a specific organization.

Czarniawska (2004) argues that the purpose of the action net concept is to free the researcher from the limitations of the traditional focus of organization studies on places, people or issues, and to capture the connections between actions occurring in time and space (see Lindberg, 2014; Korneliussen & Panozzo, 2005). Institutional ethnographers aim to analyze how the people working in different sites are “drawn into a common set of organizational processes” (DeVault & McCoy, 2006:32). Hence, Norrköping, Örebro, the SKL and Ingvar Nilsson have become important parts of my research because of me following civil servants from Eslöv, and this has given my research a breadth that an “ordinary” case study, focusing on one specific organization, would not have given me.

By having Eslöv as the common denominator throughout the research process, however, I have been able to study local government projectification up-close and in-depth. Much as the social investment work in Eslöv led me to a whole range of actors and actions “outside” Eslöv, it also led me to other project-related actors and actions “inside” Eslöv. Through a snowball effect, my social-investment-related interest in Eslöv introduced me to employees in various parts of the municipality involved in all sorts of project-related activities, such as civil servants working with project management courses and methodology, and people working with the creation and implementation of a project model and a project policy. The concept of a social investment net gives me the opportunity to study projectification beyond one single local government, but maintaining my relationship with Eslöv and following and interviewing civil servants there over the years has also allowed me to investigate local practices of projectification in depth.

## From organization to organizing

When following Eslöv employees, it rather quickly became evident that there were many activities going on in Eslöv that were connected to the idea of projects, but were not projects in and of themselves (in terms of being temporary organizations). Some civil servants talked about their day-to-day work in terms of projects. In her work as a special education teacher, for instance, one civil servant described how she uses their project model as she “maps the environment” to clarify needed improvements regarding the children’s requirements. She also persuaded her colleagues to use the same project model, so that they all work the same way and use the same language. I also found political goals described in accordance with the project model, and a project vocabulary with terms such as “impact objectives” (effektmål) and “delivery targets” (leveransmål).

Project logic, however, was not the only logic in Eslöv. Bureaucratic logic was also present, with civil servants regularly referring to rules, regulations or hierarchical orders. The same was true regarding political logic, since it became evident how important the visibility of social investment work was, or how managers strived to describe social investment practices according to a political logic in order to avoid projects being cancelled (see chapter 6).

In order to understand projectification, it became evident to me that I could not solely focus on the specific organizational units—i.e. the projects as temporary organizations and the bureaucracy as permanent—but instead needed to focus on the processes of organizing. The notion of an organizing perspective originally derives from Weick (1979; 1995), who advocated a shift in attention from studying *organizations* to investigating processes of *organizing*. The action net approach described above is an approach developed from Weick’s ideas. By placing our interest on the verb “organizing” rather than the noun “organization,” Czarniawska argues that we may not be able to “describe an organization in principle but by studying organizing it is possible to do so in practice” (In Lavén, 2008:24).

The process perspective on organizing allows me to study “the social world in motion, or in the making, rather than as being comprised by ready-made elements that can be explained through abstract principles” (Lavén, 2008:26; see also Latour, 2005, Czarniawska & Hernes, 2005). Hernes (2014) describes a process perspective on organizing as a view that let us grasp a “world in a continuous state of flow” (p. 1).

This state of flow, however, is not the same as chaos. Local government may be studied through a process perspective, but the processes going on in practice are here understood as several coexisting institutional logics being acted upon by civil servants and politicians, as presented in chapter 3.

## How to conceptualize local government projectification

How am I to analyze a case such as Eslöv, embedded in a wider institutional setting, and how can I methodologically conceptualize local government projectification? The institutional ethnographer starts with informants' stories and experiences, identifying some of the "relations, discourses, and institutional work processes that are shaping the informants' everyday work" (DeVault & McCoy, 2006:21). This is often followed by observation, more interviews, and the analysis of language to investigate "institutional work processes by following a chain of action": how it is carried out, shaped and how it organizes other settings (*ibid*). Smith (1992) talks about "the abstraction of experiences" into standardized language that is recognizable by the institution (see Eastwood, 2006:182). In my case, this means to "abstract" project-related practices into what I call the project logic and use that to analyze in relation to other logics.

Although I use the word "conceptualize" to describe my method of making sense of local government projectification, Swedberg (2012) would perhaps argue that what I in fact am doing is theorizing.

Swedberg describes the scientific enterprise as consisting of three elements, (1) *theorizing*, (2) *theory*, and (3) *the testing of theory*, and claims that only the latter two have been properly attended to by researchers. The process of theorizing has been largely neglected in social sciences he argues, but it is much needed, since:

...to work exclusively with theories, rather than to think in terms of theorizing, often translates into an awkward struggle of trying to get theory and facts together. When you theorize, in contrast, these two come together in a natural way. You begin with the facts, and an organic link between theory and facts is established from the very beginning (Swedberg, 2012:33).

Swedberg argues that the process of theorizing consist of two phases. In the first phase—what he calls a "prestudy"—the researcher observes, names and



formulates central concepts, and builds a tentative theory. In the second phase—the “main study”—the researcher draws up and executes the research design and describes the results.

Given the lack of earlier research within the field of public sector projectification, and given my institutional ethnographical approach, I would argue that my study is mainly situated within the first phases of theorizing. I start with the practices, with “the facts” as Swedberg puts it. I observe, I interview, I participate in meetings, I read documents, I formulate concepts and tentative theory, and then re-observe, reinterview and revise my concepts and tentative theories, and so on. Swedberg, however, also admits that the process tends to be “iterative: and its beginning, middle, and end do not necessarily follow in this order” (p. 8).

In the first phase of theorizing, Swedberg argues

...one needs inspiration, and to get inspiration one can proceed in whatever way that leads to something interesting ... the goal, at this stage of the process, is simply to produce something interesting and novel, and to theorize it. It is first at the stage when the theory is being tested, or otherwise confronted with data in a deliberate manner, that scientific and rigorous rules must be followed” (Swedberg, 2012:6).

Early in my research, going back and forth between reading research and visiting Eslöv, what I found interesting and novel was the idea that projects might lead to unexpected transformations and changes within local government as a result of the organizational form of the project, and the ideals, language and related practices that come with them. In Eslöv, I readily found evidence that these ideas are valid. I also found the institutional research concept of institutional logics to be useful when thinking about changes (individual and organizational, as well as institutional) resulting from the ideas and practices of something. Through the lens of project logic perspective, I could view the projects in Eslöv as a result of civil servants and politicians acting upon the project logic, in the same way that I could view the development of a project model or the formulation of political objectives in project terms as the results of actions taken in accordance with the same logic.

My method of conceptualizing has been similar to what Swedberg (2012) describes as the first phase of theorizing, and it meshes well with how institutional ethnographers often describe their work (see Smith, 2006). Using

my own experience of projects and what I found novel and interesting in their relationship to local government, I began my research endeavor by looking at the practices of local government. I interviewed and observed, and in parallel to that I read up on earlier research on projectification, public sector and local government reforms, and organizational theory. Subsequently, I formulated ideas and tentative concepts which I “tested” on colleagues at seminars and conferences. I then revised the ideas, did more field work, read more research, wrote more papers and so on.

The process of conceptualizing local government projectification is a never-ending endeavor, and “truly impermanent, imperfect, and incomplete” (Swedberg, 2012:35). This work, however, has required a range of different fieldwork techniques.

## Fieldwork techniques

In the course of my work I have used several different fieldwork techniques, which is something that the institutional ethnographic approach both encourages and allows. The use of multiple fieldwork techniques “is often to be preferred, not in order to zoom in on the ‘truth’ through different methods, but in order to create a richer picture” (Alvesson, 2009:158).

As an institutional ethnographer, one of my overarching fieldwork techniques has been to follow actors and actions related to social investment funds and/or project activities. For me, a large part of following has meant staying in contact with Eslöv employees I have met and interviewed throughout the years, gaining their trust, and thereupon being granted access and being invited to meetings and networks. On some occasions, I have been invited to observe meetings, on others to participate, and on others still I have even been invited to organize seminars. As an example, I was invited to observe a meeting between civil servants and managers belonging to three different departments to discuss—through the use of their project model—the building process for a new sports arena in Eslöv. The person who invited me was someone I had met a few times before, and whom I had asked to invite me to meetings in which Eslöv’s project model or project methodology were to be discussed; this was just such a meeting.

On another occasion, I was asked to participate in a meeting of the social investment committee in Eslöv to discuss several of their social investment

projects, and their ability to lead to long-term effects. At the meeting, I talked about my research interest in local government project activities and how I aimed to study social investment as a case of local government organizing public health through project organizations. The overarching ideas of the social investment budget in Eslöv and four projects were presented by civil servants from different parts of the organization. I participated in the meeting by asking questions, as I would have done in an interview setting, but also answered their questions, as I would have done at a research seminar regarding my study. I understood that meeting, as well as other meetings such as this, to be a mutual give-and-take situation, which I think has been beneficial for my research. On these occasions, I was able to “interview” several people at the same time, and listen to them and discuss what I saw as the topics of my research, and I was able to share some insights with them on questions regarding research on projects, implementation and long-term effects.

Ethnographic research is often seen in terms of a movement from the initial “distance” to a “closeness” to the lived realities of other people as the research progresses (see Alvesson, 2009:156). Moeran (2009) describes this as a move from a “participant observer” to an “observant participant,” in which the researcher “shift[s] from an essentially passive to a much more active role” (p. 140).

Depending on the kind of meeting and how well I knew the other participants, my role altered between meetings. I came to know the civil servants involved in the network quite well and my role at these meetings was—at least toward the end of my research—very much that of the observant participant while at several other meetings to which I was invited I kept a more low-key profile. At most of the meetings I wrote field notes and, depending on my involvement as participant, the field notes differ in length and quality.

Whereas closeness may give the researcher greater access and insight as to what is going on in the organizations, one always has to keep some distance in order to avoid “going native”—i.e., adopting the views and values of the actors being studied (see Alvesson, 2009; Powdermarker, 1967). It is extremely important, Morean (2009) argues, “to get away from the field and return to one’s home base at an academic institution ... in order to gain distance from the ethnographic experience ... and separate experience from analysis” (p. 154). I have been going back and forth between my fieldwork and my analysis, writing papers and discussing my findings at academic conferences and seminars, and thus I have kept what I view as a sufficient distance.

If someone referred to a “projectified” organization or used the words “project logic” in an interview, I regarded those as being “my” words, and have not used this as evidence of adapting to the project logic. I also think that the methodological plurality that the institutional ethnographic approach equips me with counteracts the possible misinterpretations. Not only did I interview civil servants, managers and politicians, I observed them interact with peers from inside and outside their organizations. I heard them describe and present their organization and project work, I talked with them informally, and I read their documents.

The issue of the researcher’s potential effect upon the sites he/she researches is, much to my surprise, little discussed in the ethnographic research literature.<sup>13</sup> It is, I believe, more thoroughly addressed by the literature on action research (Willis et al., 2014), interactive research (Springett, et al., 2016; Aagaard & Svensson, 2006), and even evaluation research (Patton, 2015; 2010; Vedung, 2000). That literature, as I read it, however, aims to maximize the use of different knowledge in practices—academic as well as practical—and the effect on the practices is as such not a problem, but rather an objective.

### Gaining access

Gaining access is important for all research, and for institutional ethnography it is a matter of success or failure (Moeran, 2009:152). Ethnographic research takes time, and can easily be viewed as a burden by the organizations that are targeted. The researcher asks to be invited to meetings, to conduct interviews, and to follow employees during their work day, and as such he/she demands quite a lot from the organizations. The initial contacts and the nature of the first meetings may be very important for one’s access, but also difficult to control:

Much of the success of the ‘way in’ depends on the impression you make and the time that you take to establish social contact with decision-makers or brokers who can facilitate or block access to a research setting. (van der Wall, 2009: 28)

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<sup>13</sup> It should be noted that my reading of ethnographical research is restricted to the fields of institutional ethnography (see Smith, 2006), organizational ethnography (see Yebema et al., 2009) and political ethnography (see Schats, 2009).

As mentioned, my entry point into the organizations in the municipality of Eslöv came through a fellow PhD student who worked part time in Eslöv, and who was able to vouch for me and introduce me to the “right” people who were able to give me further access. Once “inside,” I tried to be of use for the organizations or civil servants I wanted to follow. As an example, I offered my experiences as an evaluator to gain access to the network of civil servants working with social investment. They expressed a need to know more about evaluation, and I offered to discuss that with them. Throughout these discussions, I heard stories about projects and project-related practices in their surroundings. In return, I asked to be invited to further meetings and to be included in their networking activities; I was granted this access, I believe, partly because I added value to their network and was not just an observer.

Admission to the network has been highly value for me, since it immediately gave me access to six local governments and the regional level discussing social investment, and through that, to project activities as well.

I tried to be as upfront as I could be regarding my intentions and what I aimed to do with my research when I met local government employees. On some occasions, especially in the early stages of my research, it was difficult to give a specific account of my research, since it was not fully planned out in advance.

### **Interviewing as “talking with people”**

One of the institutional ethnographer’s most important techniques is the interview—or rather, several different kinds of interviews. Over the years, I came to be quite familiar with Eslöv as an organization, and I met some of the civil servants many times, interviewing a couple of them on three or four different occasions between 2012 and 2016. The purpose of these encounters was to study processes of projectification up close, and to enhance my knowledge of how these government employees describe, carry out and make sense of their own work and practices. When selecting interviewees, I first chose people actively working with social investment and/or organizational development via projects at a strategic level in the municipality. From that point on, I found interviewees through a kind of snowball effect, with in which each interview (or meeting, seminar or conference) directing me toward social investment or project activities somewhere in Eslöv or in the context surrounding it.

For the institutional ethnographer, interviewing means a wide range of techniques stretching from, on the one hand, a well-planned scheduled research interview, perhaps with some written questions to guide it, or, on the other hand, an informal talk by the coffee machine during a seminar. The informal, on-the-spot interviews may be combined with later formal or planned interviews that allow the researcher to follow up on issues raised during the coffee break (see Smith, 2006). I met several people, for example, at the social investment conferences and had informal discussions with them, and then later in the research process spoke with them in the context of a more formal, well-planned interview. The reverse also occurred, in which I started with a formal, well-prepared interview but later in the process arranged to eat lunch or have a cup of coffee with that same person just to talk more freely and/or to follow up on some issues raised in the interview.

In total, I conducted well-planned scheduled research interviews with 52 people: 25 of these were employed in Eslöv (as politicians, civil servants at a strategic level, or as project managers); 18 came from other municipalities (employed as civil servants at a strategic level, or as project managers); eight were employed by a regional or national agency (employed at a strategic level); and 1 consultant (see appendix for summary of interviews/observations).

As an institutional ethnographer, I have been “driven by a faithfulness to the actual work processes that connect individuals and activities in the various parts of an institutional complex” (DeVault & McCoy, 2006:32). Consequently, I have interviewed people in Eslöv as well as in the regional and national context of their work. Many of the interviewees are between 30 and 40 years old and they appear to be a rather mobile group of people. These civil servants travel within their own organizations, as well as visiting other organizations, attending conferences, and/or going on field trips.

Each interview lasted from 40 to 90 minutes, and the interviews were recorded and transcribed afterwards to be treated as documents about local government projectification.

A downside of viewing all kinds of exchanges with people at various research sites as interview situations in which I gather empirical material, is that these discussions are not recorded. The work load that recording everything would entail, however, would be enormous. To give an example, I once traveled by train with five civil servants for 6 1/2 hours, during which we discussed both social investment and project-related matters (as well as complete nonsense); recording and transcribing all that would have taken weeks. What I tried to do

on these occasions was make brief notes on my phone or computer if something of particular relevance struck me during the conversations. Sometimes it was an idea on how to describe something and other times it was something I wanted to discuss further with someone later at a scheduled interview.

The interviews were semi-structured, and I always brought a battery of questions—not as a strict form to blindly follow, but as a reminder of themes to discuss. The focus of my interviews was always related to projects and project activities. Even when the interviews concerned social investment activities, I asked about issues that can readily be related to project logic: the relationship between social investment projects and the “ordinary” operations; why the activities were organized as projects and funded via the social investment fund, and not as ordinary operations funded via the ordinary budget. In some sense, the social investment work has functioned as my own Trojan horse for the study of projectification. I ask about social investment, but listen for the project logic and its relationship to other logics.

### **Empirical overview of local government project models**

In my contacts with different employees in Eslöv, it quickly became evident that their work with a specific project model was of some importance. The social investment budget in Eslöv was organized with the help of that model and it was requested that this model was used in each project structure the work. The model also appeared to be rather well known in all parts of the organization, at least at a management level, and there appeared to be a general intention to implement at least some part of the model throughout the entire organization. I did, however, ponder whether this was an Eslöv phenomenon, or something other local governments were working on as well. I know from earlier research (see Montin & Granberg, 2013; Qvist, 2012; Jacobsson et al., 2012) and my own experience that local governments in Sweden tend to borrow ideas from one other, so perhaps this was the case even with project models.

I was unable to find any research on this topic, however, when I searched for articles concerned with project models and local governments, or project models and public organizations. I actually found very few studies on project models at all. I also searched the SKL’s website in hopes of finding some sort of overview, but found nothing. Empirical investigations were needed to answer the question of how common project models there are, and how they are used in practice.

I performed a Google search for the combination of the words “project model” and “local government” (“*projektmodell*” och “*kommun*” in Swedish) and located a number of links (12,500) for possible local government project models. The aim of this survey was to answer the question of whether or not the use of project models was a common feature in local government and, more importantly, if the models were intended to guide and structure merely projects, or to function as a wider organizational tool to help organize all sorts of activities, as was the case in Eslöv.

It is, of course, impossible to systematically go through 12,500 links, but I started from the top and worked my way down until I had information about 30 project models. The google search overview can be summarized in three steps:

1. Google search: projektmodell + kommun = 12,500 links.
2. Click on links indicating a municipal web (see picture below), and download information if it concerned a project model.

<sup>[PDF]</sup> [Handbok om projektmodellen - Kungsbacka kommun](https://www.kungsbacka.se/.../Kommun%20och%20politik/.../Sveriges%20Kvalitetsk...)  
<https://www.kungsbacka.se/.../Kommun%20och%20politik/.../Sveriges%20Kvalitetsk...>  
 eller är inhyrd under en kort period så hoppas vi denna projektmodell bidra till att ... Våren 2005 beslutades att införa elektronisk handel i Kungsbacka kommun ...

<sup>[PDF]</sup> [Hämösands projektmodell - Hämösands kommun](https://www.hamosand.se/download/18.../1351256969451/Projektmodell.pdf)  
<https://www.hamosand.se/download/18.../1351256969451/Projektmodell.pdf>  
 Hämösands projektmodell. Jag har en idé - om en förändring av kommunens verksamhet. På följande sidor kommer du få stöd för ditt engagemang att vilja.

[Ny projektmodell passar Gabrielle - Umeå kommun](http://www.umea.se/.../nyprojektmodellpassargabrielle.5.14ee8b149ae8194c...)  
[www.umea.se/.../nyprojektmodellpassargabrielle.5.14ee8b149ae8194c...](http://www.umea.se/.../nyprojektmodellpassargabrielle.5.14ee8b149ae8194c...)  
 "Aningen" är den spontana reaktionen från verksamhetsutvecklare Gabrielle Eriksson när det nu finns en gemensam projektmodell för Umeå kommun. Från och ...

3. For each link indicating a municipal website, (see picture above) I searched the linked webpage for the word “*projektmodell*” and downloaded information if it concerned their own project model.

Starting with step one, I ignored all pages that did not have a Swedish local government web address (i.e., links to project consulting firms). Some of the municipal links took me directly to PDF files for local government project



models, while others took me to news feeds about project models. There were yet others that took me to organizational charts in which a project model was described or introduced. Each time information about a municipal project model was revealed, I downloaded that information. For each local government generating a link, I also visited their website and searched, using their search engine, for the words “project model.” For example, I clicked on the link pictured above for Umeå, and read the text; in this particular case, it was a municipal newsletter about a woman named Gabrielle and her joy over their newly introduced project model for the entire municipality. I also searched for the word “projektmodell” on [www.umea.se](http://www.umea.se) to locate policy documents, decisions or presentations on their project model.

The downside to an investigation like this is that there is no way for me to tell whether or not the project models (as described in the documents or policies), have actually been implemented in practice. The documents might indicate, however, at least how the models were planned to be used. The overview might also indicate whether or not it appears to be common for Swedish municipalities to have a project model.

I went through the links, as described, until I reached 30 cases. The resulting sample included smaller, medium-sized and larger municipalities. There were local governments from the north, middle and south of Sweden, and a mixture of the governing political parties.

The results of the overview are discussed more thoroughly in chapter 7.

## Empirical material

Each of the fieldwork techniques described above—with some exceptions for the informal conversations—resulted in written documents. In addition to the transcribed interviews, my empirical material consists of field notes from approximately 20 meetings with the social investment network between 2014 and 2017. There are also field notes from two separate field trips: one to Norrköping, and one to Örebro. I also attended four different conferences and two rather large seminars, all of which generated field notes.

In addition to the interviews and field notes, I gathered a wide range of documents. In regard to Eslöv, these documents have been in the form of policies—such as the project policy mentioned above—or the project model, but also in the form of internal reports, PowerPoint presentations, both internal

and external evaluations and also minutes from meetings in which the project model, project methodology, or project management courses were discussed. I downloaded some of the documents via the [www.eslov.se](http://www.eslov.se) website, and others were requested from contacts at the municipality.

In terms of social investment funds, I gathered a number of documents from many different sources, but much of the material was given to me via the social investment network or at the conferences I attended. The web pages of the SKL have also been an excellent source for empirical material, and the reports and pamphlets found there have often been referred to by local government civil servants in Eslöv and elsewhere.

These kinds of documents—PowerPoint presentations, policy documents, evaluations, etc.—are what Silveman (2013) calls “naturally occurring data” by which he means empirical material that the researcher does not produce or cause to exist. These documents would have been there even if I hadn’t searched for or come in contact with them, in contrast to the interviews or the field notes which are self-produced data.

Each fieldwork technique has resulted in some sort of text, and these have been read in relationship to each other, but also in relationship to earlier research on projects and local government, with the ambition of locating projectification tendencies in the material.

Throughout my reading of the documents I have searched for descriptions of different logics and the relationships between them, asking:

- How organizational practices are described and how different practices are described differently.
- What the interviewees, the official documents and policies or documents from “outside” the organization—such as evaluations, for instance—tell us about the project logic.
- What it is about the logic of project-related work that is appealing or troublesome in relation to other logics influencing local government work.

Each answer to these questions has been grouped into themes or different kinds of conceptualizations of projectification—conceptualizations that have changed throughout the process, but ended up in the three overarching concepts described in chapters 5-7.

## Summary – the life cycle of a research project

My aim has been to conceptualize local government projectification. To do so, I have worked with an institutional ethnographical approach entailing methodological plurality and encouraging me to start with the practices and relate findings there to a wider institutional complex.

Early in my research, I found that projects might lead to unexpected transformations and changes within local government due to the organizational form of the project and the ideals, language, and related practices that accompany them. In Eslöv, a rather typical Swedish local government with a seemingly exceptional interest in project work, I quite easily found evidence of the project logic affecting more than projects as clearly demarcated temporary organizations.

The institutional logic perspective has been useful when thinking about individual, organizational and institutional change coming from the ideas and practices of the project logic. With a project logic perspective, I was able to look at the projects in Eslöv as a result of civil servants and politicians acting upon, or enhancing, the project logic. At the same time, I was able to look at the development of a project model or the formulation of political objectives in project-terms as the results of actions taken in accordance with the same logic.

Much of an institutional ethnographer's work is carried out via different kinds of interviews and participatory observation. I have conducted 52 well-planned research interviews, but in addition to that engaged in numerous informal talks with civil servants, managers, politicians, and consultants regarding projects and project-related issues. I have also participated in meetings, seminars, conferences and field trips, and conducted a survey by searching local government web pages for information regarding project models. All fieldwork has resulted in texts, which I have read and analyzed in relation to each other and to earlier research on projects and local government reforms.



## PART TWO

Projectification of local government – Eslöv and beyond

Part II, including chapters 5, 6 and 7, is the empirical part of the thesis and is intended to describe three separate, but interrelated, conceptualizations of local government projectification: *projectification as proliferation*; *projectification as transformation and adaptation*; and *projectification as organizational capacity building*. The chapters all start in Eslöv but describe also the wider institutional complex and setting related to each specific theme of the chapter.

In chapter 5, I conceptualize projectification as proliferation and discuss how clearly defined projects and project ideas are organized and diffused within and between local government organizations. I also describe different practices as consequences emanating from project proliferation and the reliance on project logic. In theoretical terms, the chapter is intended to demonstrate different, sometimes contradictory, logics at play in practice due to project proliferation.

In chapter 6, I conceptualize projectification as transformation and adaptation using social investment as a case. The translation of a social investment perspective to local government practices has resulted in a number of project-funding systems and project organizations in which traditional bureaucratic procedures are transformed into temporary organizations, and the bureaucratic, political and market logics are adapted to the project logic. Inspired by the action net approach, I describe the social investment actions taken in Eslöv as processes of projectification embedded in a horizontal as well as vertical multi-layered “institutional complex.” The institutional complex includes a network of municipalities, local government social investment front runners, consultants, conferences, a national authority, and policies, practices and project funding from the EU.

In chapter 7, I conceptualize projectification as organizational capacity building—processes that are somewhat more subtle than those of proliferation or transformation and adaptation. I describe how the project logic is spread and diffused in local government organizations, not primarily through specific projects, but through practices encouraging the project logic, and how this reinforces local government’s organizational project capacity. Through project models, project policies, project courses and project methodology, the local government mobilizes to handle future project activities.

# Projectification as proliferation – the quantity of projects and the consequences of the project logic

The purpose of this chapter is to describe how clearly defined projects and project ideas are, to an increasing extent, organized and diffused within and between local government organizations. My intent also, however, is to describe different practices as consequences emanating from project proliferation and the reliance on the project logic. In more theoretical terms, the chapter aims to demonstrate different, sometimes contradictory, logics at play in practice due to project proliferation.

In the context of local government projectification I use the term proliferation to indicate a growing reliance on the project logic that results in projects adding activities to local government practices—more production and often more funding as well. Project proliferation, however, also indicates more projects in place of ordinary local government practices, resulting in less ordinary work, and more temporary work.

In this chapter I describe how projects and project ideas circulate and diffuse within and between organizations.

There is no way to completely map out project activities in an organization as big as a municipality. Some projects—defined as temporary organizations undertaking unique actions by a specific team for a specific amount of time—might be readily identified in an organization. Using the language of Merton (1968), we might call these manifest projects. Some activities, however, that are not organized as temporary organizations, not unique, nor undertaken by any specific team for a specific amount of time, might still be described, presented and understood as projects; these activities are not as easy to identify as the manifest projects, and might be labeled latent projects (*ibid.*). Also, in terms of budget, some projects are financed by the municipality itself, while others are funded externally or in collaboration with

an external party, so one cannot simply rely on the budgets to identify all projects.

Based on interviews, observations, a survey of municipal webpages, and through the analysis of official documents, this chapter mainly focuses on manifest projects. The latent functions of project practices will be dealt with more thoroughly in chapter 6 and 7.

This chapter can be described as divided in two sections where the first (p.78—89) is devoted to the quantity of projects in Eslöv and from where these activities originates; how project ideas travel in space and time, and how they “move” between funding agencies to survive. The section also demonstrates the importance of the EU as local government project promoter and a precursor for how to organize projects as well as project funding systems and also how regional network organizations work to increase the use of EU projects in local governments.

The second section of the chapter (p.89—97) is more devoted to the consequences emanating from projects and the project logic, describing how employees understand and make sense of the quantity of projects and project practices in Eslöv.

The chapter ends with a discussion summarizing how the empirical findings are related to earlier research and theories as presented in chapters 2 and 3. First, however, I would like to reintroduce the reader to Eslöv, and also to the context of Swedish local governments.

## Eslöv – a Swedish municipality

Eslöv is a rather average municipality and city in the southern part of Sweden. It has approximately 32,000 inhabitants, and is somewhat famous for its many castles. In terms of organization, Eslöv has both a political and administrative organization. The political organization consists of a city council, a municipal executive board and seven committees, one for each policy area.<sup>14</sup> In the fall of 2017, there were 229 elected politicians throughout the organization. According to the Swedish Central Bureau of Statistics (SCB), there were

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<sup>14</sup> These are: Culture and Leisure; Work and Livelihood; Children and Family; Secondary School and Continuing Education; Environment and Planning; Services Management; and Health and Social Care.



approximately 36,800 elected politicians among Sweden's local governments in 2015. This is a reduction of 1,200 politicians compared to 2011; according to the SCB, this decrease is a trend at both the local and regional levels. It is important to note that Swedish local government politicians mainly work in their spare time (as *fritidspolitiker*), and are not remunerated. Only 4% of the elected politicians—1,320 individuals—are financially compensated for their political work (SCB, 2015).

In addition to the political organization, Eslöv has an administrative organization with civil servants planning and implementing the political decisions. In 2016, there were about 2,500 full time employees (Personalbokslut, 2016). As in all Swedish municipalities, women form a majority of the staff (80% women and 20% men), and the departments working with preschool, education, and health and social care (sometimes referred to as the “softer” policy areas), are the largest departments/committees in terms of employee numbers.

In concert with the decrease in the number of local government politicians, there has been an increase in the number of local government employees. According to the Swedish Association of Local authorities and Regions, the number of full-time local government employees is slowly but steadily increasing. In 1981, the total number of employees was approximately 630,000 and in 2016, this had risen to 840,000 (SKL, Tabell, 2016). Political logic, as discussed in chapter 3, is slowly losing its most obvious advocates and defenders, and the political power is left to a few politicians and/or civil servants.

## Eslöv – a project organizational overview

If we take a look at the last couple of years, it's fairly easy to say that there has been an increased number of projects in the organization ... and it will continue to increase. The management team (ledningsgruppen) [has also clearly said that we should increase the proportion of externally funded projects... I do not want us to restrict ourselves to the [funding from the] EU. If we do, we miss out on those kinds of projects that I previously worked with and will miss out on the money from the County Council [Länsstyrelsen] for instance. We also have lots of money within Sweden that we can apply for. I want us to talk about external funding and I want to talk about getting better at bringing our development

needs together and then apply for funding (Interview, development strategist, 2016).

This quote is from a roughly 40-year-old civil servant employed at the municipal executive office in Eslöv who is deeply engaged in various types of project activities. At the time of the interview, he had just been appointed EU project coordinator—a job that was intended to help increase the number of EU-funded projects in the municipality. He appeared to me to be very interested and invested in issues of organizational development and change. Throughout our discussions and interviews, he frequently pointed to a consultancy firm as a source of inspiration in his work. This consultancy firm had had a relationship with the municipality for several years, and had been responsible for a trainee program, several project management courses, and the development of a project model in Eslöv. The development strategist had taken part in the trainee program, as well as in the courses and the development of the project model. In addition, he had also been responsible for several local as well as international projects, and was regularly asked to give courses on project management and project methodology within the organization.

According to him, there has been an increasing interest in the organization as a whole in initiating more projects. He described how several departments want to initiate projects, but that there is also pressure from the management level to find more and new ways to attract external funding. When asked to give an overview of the municipality and its project activities, he described an organization accustomed to projects, but also an organization in which the departments have varying degrees of experience in project work:

[The department] responsible for municipal buildings (the service department) has always worked with projects. There, tasks have clear beginnings and clear endings, and they have their own project models, but we all use the same terminology.... If we look at the schools, they have used EU funds in terms of *Erasmus exchange* for a long time, and those are very clearly defined projects, with specified activities, objectives, budgets, and so on. But there is no system, it is very much up to individual teachers or superintendents... [The department of] health and social care, which is the second major department, works partly with projects. At the moment, they have one EU project regarding digitization for senior citizens... [The department of] environment and planning is working partly in the form of projects. For example, they have been cleaning up a site

where there previously was an industry dumping hazardous waste into the ground and that cleanup has been organized as a pure project... [The department of] culture and leisure has lots of projects, a lot of integration projects and youth projects... They also have a lot of cooperation with [the department of] employment and livelihood, which has worked for quite some time with projects, and many externally funded projects, with money from the county administrative board and the EU, for instance (Interview, development strategist, 2016).

To learn more about the quantity of projects in the organization I asked each department head via e-mail to give me an account of their project activities. I asked how many projects (activities with specified budget, scope and time) they had up and running as of that date. I asked if they had applied for project funding, and if so, from where, and I asked them to estimate how much of their ordinary work was influenced by project management ideas and ideals, project methodology or a project-related vocabulary.

All respondents described their department as involved in some projects and project-related activities. The head of the department for health and social care described them as being involved in six ongoing projects, mostly funded by government funding. The department for environment and planning was involved in 15 projects “not including investment projects within the ordinary budget, such as roads and parks etc.; if we include them, there are many more” (email, Nov. 7, 2016). They also referred to government funding as an important resource for their projects, but also EU funding. The head of the department for culture and leisure described three projects: two collaborative projects among several municipalities; projects funded by *Region Skåne* (the county council); and one project funded internally via Eslöv’s own social investment budget (see chapter 6). Even the municipal executive office answered my questions about project practices. They described how they managed the social investment budget, which has resulted in several projects each year, and they also told me they plan to apply for a large EU-funded project. In addition, their work with the *översiktsplan* (a municipal overview plan for the use of land and water and urban development) has been organized as a project.

### Differences between project experiences in the departments

Clearly defined and demarcated manifest projects are found in all parts of the organization. The organization's more technical departments, however, (i.e., those concerned with infrastructure, buildings, traffic and IT) have, according to the city manager, been working in project form longer than the rest of the organization (Interview, April 2014). "Softer" policy areas, however, such as health, social care, work and livelihood have increasingly been subject to project organization. This may be because of the fact that the city manager, who advocates the increasing use of projects and project methodology throughout the organization, has a background in the more technical parts of the organization. The development strategist quoted above also has a close relationship with those departments through his work with the project model and project methodology courses.

Several of the departments—including both those that are concerned with technical and with so-called softer issues—apply for and use external funding from the government or the EU in their project work. But some of them, such as the department for culture and leisure or the department for environment and planning, organize parts of their "ordinary" activities as projects within their own budget. One of the reasons for this, according to the development strategist, is to clearly demarcate who is responsible for what (Interview, 2016). In a project, what is to be done and by whom is more clearly defined than in ordinary work. An "extreme" case here is the service department (responsible for cleaning services, real estate management and services, IT and a municipal carpool), which organizes almost everything it does in project form (*ibid.*).

The city manager described Eslöv as an organization interested in project activities in all departments and at all levels of the organization. She told me that civil servants at the "street-level" are engaged in project management courses, and work as project managers on various projects. She also explained how the municipality, at a more strategic level, had developed a project model that has spread across the organization, and how their social investment budget encouraged project organizing. Even the political level is involved in project related matters: The politicians have all been introduced to the internally developed project model, been given a project methodology course, and decided upon a specific project policy for externally-funded projects.

## **Organizational add-ons and organizational transformers**

There are at least two takes on projects—or strategies for their use—in the different departments in Eslöv. On the one hand, there are projects with external funds, meaning funds that come from the EU, the national government, the region or some other external agency. These projects are often described as specific, unique, ventures achieving something that the “ordinary” organization cannot. These projects are, as such, economic as well as organizational add-ons to ordinary budgets and activities. It should, however, be noted that some of the external funds require the municipality to co-finance the projects. Many of the EU funds, for instance, require the recipients of funds to co-finance parts of the entire project budget, so that even if the projects add to the budget and the activities, Eslöv must contribute. A lot of different employees get involved in these kinds of projects, but the projects are often initiated and run by deeply-engaged civil servants (Audit report, 2009).

On the other hand, there are projects funded by the ordinary internal budgets. Some of these are projects—much like the externally-funded projects described as specific efforts made for a specific purpose—but in these cases, the funds come from the municipality and the ordinary budgets instead. Some of these, however, are rather ordinary activities that the departments have chosen to organize as projects for various reasons. These are not unique, specific efforts that demand a project, but continuous activities or even routines that are organized as projects, which translates to less ordinary work and more temporary work. These kind of projects are organized as part of an overall strategic department ambition, and are generally not initiated by engaged single civil servants, as is the case with the projects that add on to the municipality’s activities.

## **The transfer of project ideas**

Externally or internally funded—where do all these projects come from? Many of the projects described above were initiated by ambitious civil servants, mostly at a middle management level. The ideas for these projects, however, often came from other organizations and/or other projects, rather than being inspired by specific problems identified in Eslöv.

One civil servant/project manager described how their department, at the moment, was involved in two projects, both inspired by other municipalities. The first was a project originating from the municipality of Hässleholm, and came about due to an inspiring seminar given by their physical education teacher. A group of civil servants and executive managers from Eslöv attended the seminar, were inspired, and created a similar project in Eslöv for which they later applied and received external funding (Interview, project manager, 2015). The second project came from a TV show showing a municipality in the northern part of Sweden working with the idea of allowing citizens to borrow sporting equipment in the same way they borrow books at a library. This also resulted in a similar project in Eslöv (*ibid.*).

A third example, from another department in Eslöv, was a project called “the social task force,” a project idea that can be traced back to the Swedish government. This project is a collaboration between the police, social services and the schools, and targets young adults who are at risk of “being recruited into criminal networks or developing a criminal lifestyle” ([www.eslov.se](http://www.eslov.se), 2017). In 2011, the Swedish government commissioned the national police board to initiate pilot projects with social task forces in 12 municipalities, and four years later there are approximately 50 social task forces in Sweden (Socialstyrelsen, 2016). In Eslöv, the internal social investment budget funds the social task force.

Another, slightly different example of this kind of transfer of ideas came from a civil servant working strategically with organizational development who was responsible for two projects. He described how the idea for one of the projects had been “floating around” in the organization for quite some time, but had never been tested. The idea was to help civil society organizations in their pursuit of EU funds, and to support them in issues regarding project management. That idea was, in turn, the result of another project that the municipality was responsible for several years ago. The idea was brought up and discussed many times during a period of several years, without ever becoming an actual project.

The project idea was with us for a long time, but we never had the opportunity to test it out. Then the social investment fund came about and we revived the idea, wrote an application, applied and received the funds (Interview, civil servant, March, 2014).

So, the idea finally materialized as a project due to the implementation of an internal project funding system in Eslöv called a social investment budget (see next chapter). Before becoming a social investment project, however, the idea was discussed in relation to several other potential external funding agencies, such as a Swedish national fund called *Allmänna arvsfonden*<sup>15</sup> and the European Social Fund (ESF). Both of agencies were abandoned because they were perceived as complicated or too slow in their decision-making procedures (ibid.). The internal project funding system offers less competition from other project ideas as well as a proximity to the place where the decisions are being made, and the people who are making them.

There is no shortage of project ideas, whether from within the organization or from other entities; the physical distance does not seem to matter, and the ideas appear to be transferred rather easily. The fact that the activities are closely related to the project logic—i.e., projects with clearly defined resources, activities, intended outcomes, and a specified time frame—appears to facilitate transfer between different organizations and contexts. The projects are, in a sense, packaged and ready to be shipped, or “ordered” when seen on TV or at a seminar, as described above. When moved to another context, however, the projects most likely change, so that the social task force project in one municipality, for instance, differs in some respects from that in another municipality. In fact, this is one of the major points made by translation theorists: Ideas or projects are context-dependent, meaning that the effects from a specific project, may be completely different or even counterproductive in another (See Söderholm & Wihlborg, 2013; Czarniawska & Sevón, 2005).

My point is that projects do in fact travel, and they appear to travel rather readily, and when traveling they do change due to processes of translation. Sometimes the target group is changed, or the intended outcomes, resources, and even activities; sometimes this occurs to the extent that there is no resemblance to the original project at all.

In addition to moving between organizations, project ideas and projects sometimes move from one funding agency to another. By traveling between funding agencies, a project can start out as an EU-funded project, and when those funds run out, it can turn elsewhere for further funds, thus keeping the project alive. One of the projects in Eslöv, which at that time (Fall 2016) was

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<sup>15</sup> Allmänna arvsfonden funds projects aimed at children, young people or people with disabilities ([www.arvsfonden.se](http://www.arvsfonden.se)).

funded by Eslöv's social investment budget, was described by its project manager as being a former EU-funded project that in turn was the result of yet another, earlier, EU-funded project. The project started as an EU-funded project; after three years, when the funds ran out, more EU funds were allocated; and when those funds also ran out, the social investment budget stepped in to finance it. So, this "temporary" project had the life cycle of three projects by moving between different funding agencies. Much like the way projects change when moving between contexts the projects are also often required to change when switching to another funding agency: e.g., a project with a specific target group may end up with a completely different target group when moving to a new funding agency.

The public health specialist in Eslöv, responsible for their social investment budget, recommends that those who apply but are denied funding from the social investment budget look elsewhere for funding. She asks them to apply for funding from the EU funds, from the previously mentioned Allmänna arvsfonden, from governmental agencies, or from Finsam,<sup>16</sup> a collaborative agency consisting of four independent governmental agencies that fund collaborative projects. She views available project funding as a marketplace in which their own internal social investment budget is just one of several potential project-funding possibilities—and there are quite a few funding opportunities out there for Swedish local governments.

## The project funding market

To illustrate an important factor supporting the reliance on the project logic in local government, we may consider the availability of project funds and actors advocating their use, not just in local government, but in their surroundings as well. If we continue with activities eligible for funding from the social investment budget as an example—activities mainly associated with departments within the softer policy areas of the municipality—we find numerous project funding possibilities. Starting close to Eslöv, we have their own social investment budget that is available for projects. Closely related to

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<sup>16</sup> Finsam is a local collaborative association that is found in 82 places in Sweden. It is a collaboration between a municipality, the agency for employment services, the agency for social insurance, and the county council.



that is a regional social investment fund managed by Region Skåne, and, at the national level, the SKL supports social investment initiatives and engages local governments in social investment projects. Targeting the same policy areas as the social investment initiatives, we find the project funding organization Finsam, as mentioned above, an organization that initiates approximately 1,000 projects per year in the Swedish municipalities (Finsam, 2017). Much like the social investment funds, Finsam encourages collaboration, but has a specific focus on job-retraining initiatives.

Then, of course, we have the EU, with more than 350 different programs and funds to choose from. From a local government perspective, the most commonly used EU monies— comprising over half of all EU funding— come from the five major European structural and investment funds: the European Social Fund (ESF), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Cohesion Fund (CF), the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF). As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the EU is a major contributor to project organizations in European countries, at the regional as well as the local levels. The ESF has financed more than 100,000 projects in Sweden since 1995, and many of those involved local government ([www.esf.se](http://www.esf.se), 2017). According to a report from SPeL, an organization supporting projects funded by the ESF, approximately 65% of the ESF-funded projects are initiated and owned by a municipality (Spel report 2013). Adding to that are also the many projects that some other entity else owns and is responsible for, and in which local government is involved only as a partner.

From the European Social Fund (ESF) alone Eslöv received funding for 16 projects with a budget of approximately 20 million Swedish krona (SEK) during the 2007-2013 period. In 2010, a special policy was formulated specifying how to work with externally-funded projects within the municipality. In the policy, it is argued that “EU-funded projects should be viewed as a natural part of the work carried out by the organization” (Policy, 2010-09-07:1). EU projects are not to be viewed as something extraordinary in Eslöv, but as part of the municipality’s ordinary work. The policy came about due to an audit in 2009, in which the consultant conducting the audit argued that the municipality should increase its use of EU funds, because the full potential of the many funds was not met (Audit report, 2009).

The chairwoman of the city council, however, is somewhat ambivalent about EU funding. On the one hand, she recognizes that there are problems

associated with EU projects, meaning difficulties that the implementation of project causes in the ordinary organization. She also describes the co-financing situation required by some of the EU funds as problematic. On the other hand, she argues: “of course we should retrieve money from the EU! But, we need to be clear about the motives, and not just be happy to receive SEK 10 million” (Interview, 2015).

In addition to the EU funds, support from the SKL, Allmänna arvsfonden, Finsam funding, and the regional and local social investment funds, there are also government grants and project funding from specific government agencies that are announced on a regular basis. So, if you, as a local government representative, are looking for project funding and are willing to make some changes in your project idea to match the requirements of the funding agency, you will most likely find funds. Yet another option is to approach several funding agencies at the same time looking for co-financing and collaborative approaches. As an example, one of the social investment projects in Eslöv is partly financed through the social investment budget, partly through Finsam, and partly through government grants. Co-financing may mean more resources for the project but it also entails more—sometimes inconsistent—demands and requirements from the funding agencies.

### **Agents working to increase the use of EU funds in local government**

In addition to deeply engaged civil servants in Eslöv applying for funding, mobilizing support and initiating projects in a marketplace where funding from various agencies is rather easy to obtain, there are also organizations whose sole purpose is to increase the use of EU funds in local government.

With the ambition of increasing the number of EU projects in Eslöv, a *European Project Analysis* (EPA) was conducted in 2016 by the Skåne association of local authorities (*Kommunförbundet Skåne*, or KFSK). The KFSK is a regional, bottom-up organization initiated and governed by representatives from the 33 municipalities in the province of Skåne. The KFSK works to safeguard and support the development of local authority self-governance, promote interaction between local authorities, and strengthen the EU-related work of the municipalities (KFSK website). The KFSK offers to conduct EPA analysis for all municipalities in Skåne. They are not alone, however, when it comes to analyzing local government to increase the use of EU funds. Several regional collaborative organizations also offer to conduct an EPA or similar

analysis to help municipalities receive EU funding. In Skåne alone, I found 11 regional organizations offering such analyses.<sup>17</sup>

The purpose of an EPA is to “map how municipalities can use EU funding in local development planning” (KFSK webpage, November 2016). In practice, this entails a process in which municipal documents (e.g., budgets and visionary/development plans) are reviewed in the hopes of matching local development priorities with EU project-funding opportunities. The EPA method is described as an “in-depth analysis” in order to “give each individual municipality a clear picture of how to make use of EU-funding in their development” (KFSK webpage, November 2016). Eslöv was approached in early 2016 by the SFSK and was offered this type of analysis.

The analysis conducted in Eslöv resulted in the installation of an EU coordinator in the municipality (described above; the job was intended to help increase the number of EU-funded projects in the municipality). It has also resulted in a project on digitization for the elderly, and an initiative has been taken to facilitate the launching of several city-wide projects. In addition, the management encourages each department to apply for EU projects.

In sum, although Eslöv organizes most of what they are doing in a rather traditional bureaucratic manner, there are several forces that encourage the organizations and civil servants to act upon, or make use of, a project logic. There are a project friendly management in Eslöv, entrepreneurial civil servants initiating projects, available funds (internal as well as external), and actors working to endorse the use of EU projects within the municipality as well as in its surroundings.

## Projects as a break from the traditional bureaucracy

From these initial descriptions of how projects and project ideas are organized and diffused within and between local government organizations, we will now go deeper into the practicalities of project activities to more thoroughly understand how the project logic is manifested in practice. In the following

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<sup>17</sup> KFSK, Sydöstra Skåne SÖSK, Skåne Nordost and Skåne nordväst. There are also 7 different LEADER (leaderskane.se) organizations offering similar analysis to increase the use of EU project funding.

pages, I describe different practices as consequences emanating from project proliferation and the reliance on the project logic.

As shown above, projects can serve many purposes in a municipality, and the willingness of civil servants and managers to engage in projects can originate from various different sources:

I was asked by our management group if I would be interested in taking on a project management role in this project ... I had no previous knowledge about the project when I was asked to join in ... and everything wasn't really thought through when I started. The executive managers from all three involved departments signed an agreement to collaborate, but how, or to what extent, wasn't clear. I didn't know if the position as a project manager was 5, 50 or 100% when I went to my first meeting, but I received a budget, because that was set and some of the goals were set too, but not all ... I calculated, from the given budget, and I thought that it was possible to give myself a maximum of 50% as project manager and another 20% to [another project manager]. We also wanted to leave room in the budget for conferences and field trips.... Then we specified what we thought was possible to achieve within the time frame. After that, our plan was reviewed by our [the project's] steering group and the political boards of our departments (Interview, Project manager, 2016).

Judging from this quote, the organization initiating the project appeared to know very little about what they wanted to do with the project and how they wanted to do it; they left these decisions to the civil servant, who was given considerable latitude in her project management work. This is a good example of how political logic can be acted upon to initiate a project, but it also shows how there is less interest regarding the achievements—or the effects for that matter—of the project. It seems important that the organization do something regarding a specific issue, that it shows decisiveness and the ability to take—and demonstrate—action (the political logic). However, how or what it amounts to is of no immediate political concern.

This leaves the civil servants with considerable freedom of action, something that is a common theme in my interviews with those involved in projects. It is also suggested to be a particularly attractive feature of the project format. The perceived freedom in terms of a project is often expressed as the possibility to do something other than the ordinary bureaucratic work.

The civil servant quoted above (a person roughly 50 years of age, and who had been working in Eslöv for approximately 20 years), was employed 60% as a special education teacher, and engaged 40% in a project as project manager. She viewed her project activities as an opportunity to be involved in activities that were more visible than those of her ordinary work. The project work, she argued, receives more attention, it challenges me and demands more responsibility from me than the ordinary, special education work:

I am the boss of my project, even though there is a steering group and a project team, I am the one deciding how it will turn out ... you are able to use your entire potential [in project work] and it is challenging because it stands or falls with you as project manager, even if you have many people around you ... What I do as a special education teacher is very nice, but it's not that challenging. I have done it for a long time and it's safe and comfortable, but that's just not me as a person to be safe and comfortable (Interview, civil servant, 2015).

She continued and explained how this urge to do something other than the ordinary work led her to a training course in project management that was arranged by the municipality—something she wanted to do in order to “raise the level of ambition” in her own work. When I interviewed her, she was not involved in any projects, but she expressed a great interest in doing so in the future. In this example, there is a clear break from activities more reliant on the bureaucratic logic to activities associated with the project logic, and they are presented as almost contradictory practices. She jumps from one logic to the other, and there is no real interaction between the two.

In a similar fashion, the development strategist described two externally-funded projects in which all 13 project members referred to the excitement of project work and the challenges it brought as the main reasons for involving themselves in the projects. They were all “in total agreement,” he continues, “politicians as well as civil servants, that this [the engagement in projects] is something we should do more of” (Interview, development strategist, 2017).

Another civil servant/project manager described her involvement in projects as a career move. By engaging in a project, she was later offered project management assignments that also led her to engagements at a more strategic departmental level. Thanks to the involvement in projects she is now, she argued, “involved at a management level in the work with our quality, and management system” (Interview, civil servant, 2015).

The reasons for a person's involvement in projects does differ and it appears to be attractive both as a break from the ordinary work, and also as a possibility to climb the "corporate ladder." The involvement in projects is also perceived as a possible way of becoming involved in more strategic work at a management level, and in closer proximity to the political leadership. In these cases, the project logic was used as a break from the bureaucratic logic, but also as a rapprochement with political logic.

The individual sense of excitement described here, in which civil servants engage in projects to do something other than ordinary work or to advance professionally somehow, can also be observed at an organizational level. The social investment budget, as mentioned above and further dealt with in chapter 6, can be described as an organizational adventure or experiment. According to the city manager, organizing the social investment budget as a project funding system "is also a way to govern. We say that we want these things to happen. We want it to stimulate new ideas" and it has "sparked huge creativity," she argued (Interview, city manager, 2014). The social investment budget requires projects to be something other than ordinary activities: collaborative, innovative, creative, and built upon scientific evidence. Project funding actors commonly possess these kinds of requirements. The European structural and investment funds, as well as Finsam, all require collaboration and innovation, and for project activities to be something other than ordinary work. The development manager in Eslöv, a person headhunted from a consultancy firm to work on issues of organizational development in Eslöv, sees the project form as a prerequisite for organizational development, and argues that "the idea of the project form is to test out something that runs counter to the existing organization, and then decide whether to change existing structures to make use of lessons learned" (Interview, development manager, 2014). The projects, from this perspective, are a way of testing what is perceived as impossible to accomplish within ordinary activities.

This is a good example of clashes between logics in which the project logic "allows" the organization to do something the other logics prevent. Local government, heavily inspired by bureaucratic logic, is regarded as more or less impossible to develop without switching to, or taking advantage of, the project logic; the project logic allows the entity to run "counter to the existing organization," i.e., to do something completely different or the opposite of what the organization usually does.

## Organizational respirators

The perceived break with traditional bureaucratic procedures is for some more a matter of survival than for others. Many of the projects I came across in Eslöv were quite small in terms of economic resources, so most people were involved part time in these projects. In some cases, people's full-time employment was built around different projects, and if you are in the earlier stages of your career, projects might be your way into the labor market. One of the civil servants, a person perhaps 25 years old and newly graduated from the university, describes how she began her employment in Eslöv as part-time project manager. Through that work she quickly got involved in two more projects, and her employment was then built around three different projects, but also restricted to those projects. When the project funding ends her employment will end as well. But she has been able to "survive" through the allocation of more funding and involvement in several other projects: "I'm now working full time, but still a project employee" (Interview, project manager/civil servant, October 2015).

When employed in local government, the employment normally become tenured (*tillsvidareanställning*) after two years due to the employment protection act (1982:80). By tying a person to one or several projects, however, the employer may avoid tenure, but still keep the employee for more than two years. The municipality may then tie personal resources to the organization without committing to a long-term relationship.

The projects can as such function as organizational "respirators," keeping certain activities or specific job positions alive. Another civil servant, also a young person, perhaps 25-30, was engaged as a project manager in several projects. She describes how one of her projects originally was funded by the department she worked for. Even though the management at the department found the project work to be important, and achieved good results, they could not find room for it within the ordinary budget for the coming year, and planned to terminate it. However, "when the social investment budget was installed in the municipality we saw an opportunity to make [our] project last" (Interview, civil servant/project manager, 2015). In this way, the department could continue the work as a project and prolong the employment of the civil servants involved, but with funding coming from the social investment budget instead of their own. As such, they also gained resources as the project no longer burdened their own budget. For the individual civil servants, especially the

younger ones where the project employment might be one of their first jobs, these projects are also a way to establish themselves on the labor market.

Another example of the struggle for survival is the example given above where an ESF-funded project survived over and over again by applying for, and receiving new funds when the end of the project period approached. Two of the social investment projects also applied for, and received funding to extend their project periods. So, even though the very concept of a project indicates temporality, meaning something with a predefined beginning and end, there are several possibilities to prolong activities, in project form.

In these cases, the local government practices appear to allow the project logic and the bureaucratic logic to co-exist. Local government bureaucracy adapts to the project logic, internalizing it almost like a routine. These projects (and the project job positions) are not temporary in the sense of activities ending after a specific period of time. Rather, they are repeating sequences, changing somewhat in accordance to the requirements of the funding agency in an eagerness to keep certain activities and job positions alive.

## Organizational inertia

In addition to keeping “good” employees in the organization, one of the reasons for projects ending up being prolonged instead of implemented is to be found in organizational inertia, according to one civil servant working at a strategic level in Eslöv with issues of organizational development. He is in his early 30s and one of the entrepreneurial “engaged civil servants” mentioned in the audit (2009) above who find and apply for funding for projects in Eslöv. As an employee at the strategic level of the organization, he appeared to have both the freedom to initiate and engage in projects and the necessary access points to managers and politicians for their approval. Organizational inertia is, according to him, common in Swedish municipalities. As briefly mentioned, projects with specific funding from any project funding agent are to try something “new” and, if successful, implement the results in the ordinary organization. However, the civil servant interviewed here suggests that implementation is rare and difficult in relation to these kinds of projects. He illustrates this by telling me about a project he was involved in: This was an EU funded project, the biggest in terms of money that Eslöv had ever had (approximately SEK 10 million from the EU). The project started in 2012, but originated, like several other projects in



Eslöv, from earlier projects. In fact, it was prolonged three times via applications for new funding. Implementation in the ordinary permanent organization was avoided. According to him, the project team pushed hard for implementation in the permanent organization each time the project came close to the end, but found it “easier” to locate new funding.

### **Easy to initiate, but less so to implement**

When initiating the project described above, the project manager and the project team used a “social investment perspective” as their argument to the managerial and political level. The project will result in savings in terms of welfare benefits, and lead to lower future costs for the municipality, they argued. The politicians considered their arguments and decided to engage in the project, which then was prolonged three times with new funding. However, when the project team—using the same rhetoric concerning social investment—argued for implementation in the ordinary organizations, the management and political leadership appeared less interested or willing:

[The project] had saved an average of SEK 20 million in welfare benefits [samhällsvinst] and that is a conservative estimate. Still, [the politicians and upper management] did not want to continue this operation. We showed that the project did have a direct impact on income support which dropped significantly during the project period ... [and] there is a general willingness to continue to work like this. But these arguments [our social investment arguments] were put into question when presented. [The politicians and upper management] were eager to discuss and talk about social investment and the use of socio-economic calculations when initiating the project, but they were not quite ready to take those arguments into consideration in their implementation decisions (Interview, civil servant/project manager, 2014).

The chairwoman of the city council remembers the presentation from the project described above, and recalls that the project team was furious about the fact that no implementation was to happen, “and they were probably right” she added (Interview, city council chairwoman, 2014). She explained the situation by pointing to turbulence in the department responsible for the project, a department that at the time struggled with finances and the recent dismissal of a manager. The result was that the project (after surviving the life cycle of three

projects) ended, and the employees returned to either ordinary activities in the municipality or to unemployment.

In this case, the more experimental characteristic of the project logic, of doing something different and trying out innovative ideas, seemed to mesh well with the political logic of taking action and setting aside resources for a specific activity. However, this was only during the initial phases of the project. When arriving at the actual results—results that were anticipated from the outset—a bureaucratic logic takes over, and there is a clash of logics resulting in a situation in which the project either continues as a project or gets canceled. The organizational inertia described by the civil servant can also be seen as resistance on the part of the bureaucratic logic, keeping uncertainty and “different” activities at a distance. The practices then have to rely on the project logic to continue the work and a market (logic) for available funding.

## The visibility of project organizations

One particular feature of the projects in Eslöv (not always explicitly expressed in interviews, but found underlying the description of civil servants’ work), is the visibility that is perceived to come with the format of projects. When something is organized as a project it becomes a possible subject of visibility. A project can be “uplifted” or extracted from the “messiness” of ordinary work, and be described separately as something other than ordinary work—as focused activities, and activities with specified resources, all in accordance with the project logic.

The chairwoman of the city council talks about the importance of visibility, and takes the social investment budget as an example, and how that has helped to “put a real focus on these issues.” She calls the social investment work a “focus area” and a “political priority” (Interview, politician, 2015). Continuing with the social investment budget as an example, the city manager argued that even though it is not much money the social investment budget “has been widely recognized, there is a lot of talk about it, it is fun and it encourages coworkers to contribute ideas and it stimulates creativity” (Interview, city manager, 2015). Through projects and a project funding system social investment activities have become visible to the entire organization, meaning that some activities are now more visible than before due to the label of a social investment project.

The specific focus on a specific task can also further the relationships between civil servants and politicians:

It also becomes visible, what you do. Project work is very visible ... We were continuously asked to present our work to the politicians; they posed some questions and they really liked what we did and how we presented our work. We had no problem with [the chairwoman of the city council], quite the opposite. She likes this and said that it is needed in the municipality. I know this is important, she said, so we will continue following your work ... but [the project work] is also challenging, because if I don't do a good job, that is also visible (Interview, civil servant, 2015).

This relationship between civil servants and politicians is perhaps not as common when it comes to ordinary work. Each social investment project is continuously asked to present the development, and later on the results, of their project to the politicians. Despite the fact that these are quite small projects, in terms of finances, they are relatively “visible” in the organization and given much political attention, due to the fact that they are organized as projects.

One project manager employed at the department for culture and leisure, a department engaged in many projects, describes how the involvement in project work is always somehow connected to the issue of resources. The project as organizational solution, she argues, is chosen because we want to show politicians that what we do is good:

...it is always important to be able to show concrete examples and facts of what works and why they [politicians] should invest in this and not something else. I think this is common in municipalities, that you must show why they [politicians] should make certain choices in the budget (Interview, project manager, 2015).

The projects are viewed as both being able to attract political attention, but also resulting in concrete and easy to present practices.

## Summary

Key findings in this chapter are that projects and project ideas diffuse within as well as between local governments as innovative attractive organizational solutions. Projects are either economic and organizational add-ons to ordinary budgets and activities or ordinary activities transformed into projects.

In Eslöv, we found an organization that during the last couple of years has witnessed an increasing use of projects, especially in the softer policy areas such as health, social care, culture and leisure, and work and livelihood, and there is really nothing indicating a break from this proliferation trend. In many respects, the idea to work in project form appears to come from the more technical departments (IT, infrastructure, buildings and traffic) of the municipality via relocation of staff at a strategic level of the organization (city manager, development strategist). But also via, what I perceive as, a striving to organize activities within the softer policy areas in a similarly visual, concrete and results-oriented manner as in the IT or construction projects.

Many of the projects presented in this chapter aimed to develop municipal practices somehow, and were thought of as innovative or at least something other than what was going on in the ordinary municipal work. Project work was attractive to civil servants as a break from ordinary bureaucratic procedures. They were seen as challenging and as practices that gave the civil servants more responsibility and got them closer to the strategic level of the organization. From the managers' and the politicians' perspective, the projects are attractive since they may function as statements demonstrating that an organization is doing something for a specific cause, something innovative and something visible.

Project work lends itself rather well to descriptions of what will be done, by whom, when and for how much, which extracts them from the "messiness" of ordinary work. In addition to making such work more visible, it also becomes more "transferrable" between different locations and contexts. A positive take on this movement between organizations and municipalities is the learning possibilities that comes with that. A more critical take suggests the projects to be the result of another project in another context rather than from locally identified problems. Translation theorists (Lindberg, 2014; Lavén, 2008:26; Latour, 2005; Czarniawska & Hernes, 2005;) would argue that projects are context-dependent, meaning that a specific project in one municipality may function and result in completely different effects in another, depending on

context. There are several processes of translation to take into account when moving a project from one context to another.

As a result of these projects being thought of as something other than ordinary activities, or even “something that runs counter to the existing organization,” as one civil servant expressed it, they appear to be less suitable for implementation. When launching a project, the political logic as well as the bureaucratic, market and project logics appear to coexist in harmony—they all propose that “the best” actions be taken for a specific cause, and already at the start give credit for expected results. However, when the project reaches its end and the results are to be implemented in the ordinary organization, the logics appear to be more at odds with each other—the political logic is more interested in starting new projects than taking care of old initiatives, the bureaucratic logic resists change from “outside,” and the project logic struggles for survival, which is promptly aided by a market (logic) of project funding agencies.

In Eslöv I found several examples of “implementation failure,” in which the projects either ceased to exist after they were finalized, or new funding was allocated allowing them to continue, which for some projects meant surviving the life cycle of a project several times. This scenario is not unique to Eslöv. Sahlin-Andersson (1996) as well as Sahlin (1996; 1991), Forssell et al., (2013) and Jensen et al., (2013) describe similar phenomena where projects increase the influx of new projects rather than resulting in intended changes in the ordinary organizations. The project and bureaucratic logics adapt to each other, with the “temporary” projects becoming “new” projects in what is almost like a bureaucratic routine, and the entrepreneurial civil servant work is not so much about innovative project ideas as it is about finding new funding (in the project funding marketplace) to prolong the activities and/or job positions.

These projects are initiated using the project logic. From a political logic perspective, the initiation of a project represents the ability to take action, show decisiveness, and/or make development or change visible, and it supports the same thing as the project logic. Even the market logic is somewhat apparent in the initiation phase of a project as a proponent of competition between project ideas in which funding agencies “award” the “best” projects with funding. In a wider market logic perspective, the calls for funding as announced by funding agencies, are rather powerful governing tools directing the attention of local governments toward specific causes, but money only ends up being spent on those who “win” and receive funding. In the end, however, these projects are often dismissed using a bureaucratic logic that is strongly rooted in local

government, and resists operations that runs counter to its ordinary procedures. The critique found in the literature of increasing “short-termism” and implementation failure is then somewhat beside the point, since the goal of local government project management appear to be short-termism. To initiate a project is as such both rewarding—it shows decisiveness and action—and rather risk free. If the organization finds itself in a situation where cutbacks or redundancies are required, it appears rather easy to dismiss a project or just let it “die out” by itself. When the funding is out, the project is over.

In terms of projectification, we can thus far describe two general views of projects. On the one hand, there were projects with external funds, contributing an economic as well as organizational add-on to ordinary budgets and activities. These were activities that the organization might not have done at all without the projects, and where the project format was mandatory. The funding agencies require the funds to be used in project form. The initiation of these kinds of projects seemed unproblematic, but when it came to deliberately changing something in the ordinary organization due to the results of these projects, there was resistance resulting from several logics clashing and/or resisting change.

On the other hand, we found “ordinary” activities, activities that the organization was expected to carry out, funded by the ordinary budget but organized in the form of projects. In these cases, the project format was not mandatory, but deliberately chosen. These were not unique, specific efforts that demanded a project, but continuous activities or even routines that were organized as projects as part of an overall strategic ambition of the departments, and not solely run by individuals. Some departments, like culture and leisure for instance, organized some of their ordinary activities as projects in order to gain visibility and more easily sort out who is responsible for what, while others, such as the service department, organized almost everything like projects. Here, we found no immediate clash between logics, but something that might be described as the coexistence of logics—activities designated for the bureaucracy were dealt with through projects. The bureaucratic logic and project logic adapted to each other, resulting in practices in which ordinary bureaucratic activities were organized in temporary, but repeated, project form.

Hence, in terms of the conceptualization of projectification, we found two separate but intertwined processes. The first involved the adding of organizational activities to the ordinary organizations, and the latter involved the process of transforming ordinary activities into the form of projects. In the

first process, consequences come in the form of more activities, as well as more economic resources for local government. But these consequences are often rather distant from, or de-coupled from, the ordinary organization, and clashes between logics occur first and foremost when/if the project's results are to be implemented. In the latter process, consequences for the ordinary organization are more immediately noticeable, since it changes the practices of specific activities to those of the projects, and organizational units and departments in their surroundings will have to adapt to that as well.

Possible consequences of both these processes of projectification are that different local government practices, following a project logic, begin to compete for resources more than before, temporary job positions might become more frequently used, the focus of attention might fluctuate more readily depending on the initiation of projects, and certain activities might be more easily terminated as projects.

In the next chapter, we will take a closer look at the latter process of projectification by studying the implementation of a social investment budget in Eslöv and beyond, and how this transforms "ordinary" practices to those of the project.





# Projectification as transformation and adaptation – the case of social investment

The previous chapter focused mainly on the clearly defined projects and project ideas and how those were organized and diffused within and between local government organizations. In terms of projectification, I described two separate but intertwined processes. On the one hand, there were projects with external funds, contributing a financial as well as an organizational add-on to ordinary budgets and activities. On the other hand, we found “ordinary” activities organized as projects. These were not unique, specific efforts that demanded a project, but rather continuous activities or even routines transformed to be organized as projects.

In this chapter, the latter process of projectification will be investigated more thoroughly, as ordinary bureaucratic procedures transform into projects and adapt to the project logic. The empirical focus is that of local government social investment work. The translation of a social investment perspective to local government practices has resulted in a number of project funding systems and project organizations in which traditional bureaucratic procedures are transformed into temporary organizations, and the bureaucratic, political and market logics adapted to the project logic. Using social investment as a case has allowed me to study processes of projectification as embedded in a horizontal as well as vertical multi-layered “institutional complex” (see DeVault & McCoy, 2006:32).

Inspired by institutional ethnography and the action net concept, I start with the local practices in Eslöv, and follow their actions in terms of social investment practices toward other municipalities, toward the regional as well as the national and international level. I describe in this chapter a social investment community, or an “institutional infrastructure” (Hinings et al., 2017), held together by:

- *Conferences*, at which civil servants from different municipalities meet and discuss social-investment-related issues with regional and national authorities.
- *Networks*, organizing local as well as national conferences, seminars and meetings between local and regional actors, and between specific professions.
- *Publications*, distributed and promoted through conferences and networks.
- *Consultants*, promoting and teaching social investment practices.
- And finally, as something that permeates the conferences, the networks, publications, and the workings of the consultants—*projects* and *project ideas*, as “good practices,” moving from one organization to the other, from one financier to another, and translated into different contexts, helping to keep the institutional social investment infrastructure together.

First however, we need to give the concept of social investment some attention and establish a general idea of its application in a European, as well as a Swedish context. After that, I describe the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SKL) as an important social investment promoter following agreements with the Swedish government. I also take a closer look at the municipalities of Örebro and Norrköping, both of which are involved in development projects with the SKL, and are regarded by other municipalities as social investment front runners. The SKL, Örebro and Norrköping are also all key actors at social investment conferences around the country. They take part in the development of models and techniques for local government social investment funds, and Örebro and Norrköping are furthermore constantly subjected to field trips from other municipalities, including Eslöv, that want to learn from their experiences. The SKL, Örebro and Norrköping are an important part of the institutional social investment infrastructure and, as such, an important part of the social investment practices taking place in Eslöv. After the descriptions of Norrköping, Örebro, and the SKL, I describe in some detail the social investment practices in Eslöv and in their immediate surroundings. The chapter ends with a summarizing discussion in which the empirical findings are related to earlier research and theories as presented in chapters 2 and 3.

## Social investment – an overview

In the late 1990s, new ideas concerning the role and shape of social policy began to emerge across the international community and on the level of international organizations such as the OECD, UNICEF, the EU and the World Bank (see Jenson & Saint Martin, 2003; Mahon, 2008). Crucial to this new approach was not only that social policy and economic growth are mutually reinforcing, but that social policy is a precondition for economic growth:

While the policies put forward focus on promoting equal opportunity in the present (by facilitating access to education and training and to the labor market), this is expected to produce benefits in the future in terms of a reduction in the intergenerational transfer of poverty and inequalities, but also in terms of economic and employment growth (Morel et al., 2012:11).

These ideas of social policy and economic growth as mutually reinforcing have no unified theory or single intellectual source of inspiration (Morel et al., 2012), but have in common a critique of neoliberalism. However, at the same time it shares a neoliberal critique of the traditional post-war welfare state. The increasing polarization and poverty rates, and the growing problem and cost of social exclusion has given rise to critiques of neoliberal social prescriptions. At the same time, the traditional welfare state is criticized, from this “new” perspective, for being:

...ill-equipped to deal with the transition to post-industrialism, the social and demographic transformations of families and society [and for] their capacity not to mortgage the wellbeing of future generations (Morel et al., 2012:9; see also Esping-Andersen et al., 2002).

Different labels have been used to describe this movement: “social development,” the “developmental welfare state,” the “enabling state,” “inclusive liberalism” or the most commonly used, “social investment perspective” (Morel et al., 2012).

A major international promoter of the social investment perspective is the EU. In 2010, the European Commission published *Europe 2020 – A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*, a 10-year strategy for Europe. To help reach the objectives set in Europe 2020, a “Social Investment Package” was

launched by the Commission in 2013 as guidance to member states for modernizing their welfare systems in response to Europe’s common challenges: “‘Preparing’ people to confront risks throughout their lives, rather than simply ‘repairing’ the consequences, is key to the social investment approach,” it is argued (EC, 2015:4). As part of the social investment package, pilot projects are initiated with the ambition of building “a ‘knowledge bank’ to promote and facilitate the exchange and dissemination of good practice” (p. 19). Member states’ implementation of social investment will receive substantial financial support through the European Social Fund, since the ESF “and other EU funds have a vital catalytic role to play in mainstreaming the social investment approach” (EC, 2015:28). Aside from the many project funds, several initiatives are taken by the Commission to support the social investment package—initiatives not only supporting the social investment approach, but also projects as the organizational solution.<sup>18, 19</sup>

### What is a “social” investment?

Traditionally, an investment is an activity that entails a certain sacrifice of resources that reduces consumption short-term, but is expected to lead to the increasing availability of the resource, and thus boost consumption, in the future (Hultkrantz, 2016). Something that impedes our understanding of investments in general is that they are not reflected in their entirety in ordinary financial accounts. Investments tend to have a time horizon that exceeds the one-year budget cycle of local governments. An investment also implies an activity that aims to create a difference in economic outcomes between two alternatives, one with investment and one without—a difference that is also difficult to capture in ordinary financial accounts (*ibid.*).

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<sup>18</sup> Examples of initiatives supporting the social investment approach: Youth Employment initiative, “Erasmus for All” programme, Social Business Initiative, Directive on Energy Efficiency, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Programme for Social Change and Innovation (PSCI) and the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD).

<sup>19</sup> How or to what extent the social investment approach has affected the member states is difficult to assess, and beyond the scope of my research. There are also social investment initiatives taken in European (and other) countries that are not directly related to the workings of the EU. The US, Canada, France and the UK are all countries that to a varying degree are seen as front runners regarding social investment (see Backström, 2014).

As an example, Swedish local governments are responsible for key welfare provisions such as pre-schools and nine-year compulsory schooling and elder care. Many of those activities could be argued to be social investments, intended to provide welfare effects for the future. But it is difficult to distinguish between measures of immediate consumption and investments made for the future: Is economic support for young athletes something that helps them feel good and be happy about themselves today, or is it a measure aiming to develop healthy habits that make them less in need of care as adults? In ordinary municipal financial accounting everything, with the exception of investments in tangible assets such as buildings and machinery, is regarded as public consumption, but with a social investment perspective, even non-tangible assets are to be treated as investments (Hultkrantz, 2016).

When one talks about social investments, one talks about costly measures aiming to stimulate “good” development, or actions taken to remove obstacles hindering such development. The return on those kinds of investments is an increased future production capacity, or reduced future cost, such as costs related to crime or clinical treatment. The “social” in social investment indicates that the investment cost comes from taxes or donations, and is not an individual matter. In several European countries, social investment funds have been a way to attract private capital for these kinds of public investments (Backström, 2014). The Swedish social welfare system is, however, tax-financed and the discussions in Sweden have not to any greater extent concerned the issue of getting more funding, but instead focused on how to utilize existing public funding as efficiently as possible.

## Social investment in Sweden

Sweden, like all the Nordic countries, has a welfare state that is universal and tax-financed. It aims to provide a high level of quality service and benefits for all citizens, independent of their status in the labor market (Esping-Andersen et al., 2002). With social investment, Morel, Palier and Palme (2012) argue that we are now witnessing an emerging paradigm possibly replacing, or at least adding to, earlier paradigms such as Keynesian and neoliberal social policies. Sweden is described as a country that spends more money than most other European countries, outnumbered only by Denmark, on “investment oriented social expenditures” such as childcare, education and rehabilitation (Ferrera,

2013). Different actors and agencies are developing and advocating for social investment on national, regional, and local levels.

Even though the advocates for social investment argue for paradigmatic changes, the practical outlets of the social investment perspective have thus far mainly been the initiation of *social investment funds* in local and regional governments.

The strategic aim of social investment funds should be to affect the entire municipal organization as a whole regarding organization, governance, resource allocation, monitoring and evaluation (Nilsson, 2014: 216).

Ingvar Nilsson, a Swedish professor of political economy and a consultant, has over the last couple of years trained over 50 municipalities in socio-economic calculations and how to set up a social investment fund. He has traveled more or less the entire country holding lectures and seminars, and is accordingly a dominant policy entrepreneur for the Swedish contextualization of the concept. He argues that a social investment perspective should regard social policies as investments, not costs, and public organizations ought to make early investments in people's lives to avoid future costs (Nilsson, 2014).

The first Swedish municipal social investment fund was initiated in 2006 by the city of Nynäshamn (Jatko, 2014). In 2017, about 100 (out of 290) municipalities had one, and about 20 were considering starting a social investment fund (Hultkrantz & Vimefall, 2017).

The funds range from SEK 2 to 500 million, and are found in big cities as well as in small, and in municipalities governed by right-wing as well as left-wing majorities—social investment funds are found almost everywhere and scattered across the country (Hultkrantz & Vimefall, 2017). The capital used in these funds is either resources allocated from the ordinary budgets, or money made available through budgetary surplus (Balkfors, 2015). By administrating these as project funds, it is possible to invest in activities that extend over several years, it is argued, in contrast to what ordinary municipal budgets allow. The funds are made available to employees in the municipalities, and in some cases even to civil society organizations, who can apply for specific project ideas. The idea with the funds is to invest in preventive initiatives that eventually will lead to reduced municipal costs. According to the senior advisor at the Forum for Social Innovation, Sweden is unique when it comes to initiating social

investment funds on the sub-national level (Interview, 2015).<sup>20</sup> No other country has that amount of social investment activity within local government.

According to a survey conducted by the SKL (2015; Hultkrantz, 2015) aimed at finance managers in all Swedish municipalities, the four most common features associated with social investments are: promoting early investments in people's lives; socioeconomic gains; preventing organizational fragmentation by coordinating financial resources; and promoting collaboration within their own organization. According to the same survey, social investments are applied first and foremost in the areas of social services, education, work and livelihood, and public health. The most commonly used target groups are children and the young, followed by unemployed people.

The survey reveals social investments as not just targeting local government issues in the periphery, but activities at the very heart of local government practices as well. This is important when studying social investment as a case of projectification. The transformation and adaptation of ordinary work to project work occurs not just anywhere, but in what could be called the mandatory welfare services, such as pre-school, school and social services.

### **National promoter and local front runners**

If the EU is described as an important international influencing force and promoter of social investment, the national equivalent in Sweden would be the SKL—the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions. The SKL represents and advocates for local government, and all Swedish municipalities working with social investment have some sort of relationship with the SKL via social investment conferences, projects, or courses and reports.

All of Sweden's 290 municipalities, 20 county councils, and multiple regions are members of the SKL, and the SKL represents and acts on their behalf. The association's operations are financed by the fees paid annually by members in relation to their population and tax capacity (SKL webpage: [www.skl.se](http://www.skl.se), 2017).

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<sup>20</sup> The Forum for Social Innovation is a collaborative organization between academia, industry, government and non-profit organizations that promotes the ideas of social innovation and social entrepreneurship.

Our mission is to provide municipalities, county councils and regions with better conditions for local and regional self-government. The vision is to develop the welfare system and its services (SKL webpage: [www.skl.se](http://www.skl.se), 2017).

In 2008, the SKL and the Swedish government reached an agreement regarding social investment that resulted in a three-year project involving 20 municipalities and 11 county councils, with a budget of approximately SEK 100 million. This project resulted in numerous local social investment (sub-)projects, and marks the beginning for the SKL and their work of developing guides and models for social investment and social investment funds (SKL report, 2011). After that initial project, a new agreement was made with the Government in 2011 resulting in a “new” project involving about 50 municipalities and county councils/regions. This time, the emphasis was on “good practices” ready for dissemination (SKL report, 2015).

As an organization, the SKL is to function as an intermediary between the national and the local and regional governmental levels. In their ambition to promote social investment work, the SKL (together with consultants and/or researchers) has produced and distributed reports with titles such as:

- What is social investment? 17 questions and answers (2014)
- Guide for impact evaluation in social investments (2014)
- Checklist for politicians and decision makers (2015)
- Don't wait!—Guide for investment in early intervention for children and young people (2015)
- Social investments—results from a survey (2015)
- Organization and management of social investments (2015)

The SKL also develops administrative IT tools designed specifically for municipalities working with social investment funds, and they arrange conferences and courses as well.

The latest agreement between the Government and the SKL, which also resulted in a project, was initiated in 2015 and aims to further develop the social investment model. However, this time they specifically work with two municipalities that are regarded as frontrunners – Norrköping and Örebro (see below).

The person responsible for the social investment projects at the SKL argues that financial and organizational collaboration are key elements in the



work with social investment funds in local government. He described public organizations in general, and municipalities in particular, as organizations constructed in the form of “silos” with coordination and collaboration difficulties—difficulties that their social investment model aims to overcome. The development work in Örebro and Norrköping is to function as an example of good practices for all municipalities and county councils in Sweden.

Here is an opportunity for them (Norrköping and Örebro) to become leaders in the field ... to drive development forward. I believe we need to find somebody that could function as a pilot where we can work more intensively.... We have been working a lot this year with these organizations on how to go from an idea to something that could actually change practices. We've also focused on project management—how to accomplish the actual project, how to control and evaluate and also to organize so that it becomes possible to determine if the projects lead to results or not (Interview, civil servant/project manager SKL, 2015).

Project management is presented as being important in the development of a social investment model. The municipalities are to be skilful when it comes to initiating, accomplishing, controlling and evaluating projects. The permanent organizations should mobilize to handle future project activities:

We put a lot of emphasis on avoiding what usually happens when projects come to an end—they either disappear or continue in some small scale somewhere in the organization. The implementation issue is very important and if you do initiate a social investment project that is successful, and where an evaluation can show good results, and that the project is cost-efficient, then the project should be part of the ordinary operations. But we see how difficult that is. It challenges the organizations which then must prioritize between ordinary or project activities.... Sometimes it also means you must employ more staff or have several of the already employed work differently than before (Interview, civil servant/project manager SKL, 2015).

The projects challenge the ordinary procedures and put pressure on the ordinary organizations to prioritize or adopt the “new” activities.

In addition to being a part of the SKL's development project, both Norrköping and Örebro are municipalities that are often invited to present their

social investment work at conferences, and are also common subjects for field trips in which other municipalities visit them to learn from their work. According to the person responsible for the social investment fund in Örebro, they are now forced to say no to inquiries about field trips—there are too many, and it takes too much time (Interview, civil servant, 2016). When someone inquires about a possible field trip to Örebro, a rather specific aim is required, as well as a list of people attending. The representatives from Örebro want to ensure that they too can gain something from the visits (*ibid.*).

Representatives from Norrköping visited Eslöv just a year before Eslöv initiated its social investment budget, and Eslöv in turn has taken field trips to both Norrköping and Örebro to learn from their social investment work. Norrköping is often referred to as the first municipality with a social investment fund, and has influenced many municipalities to follow its lead. Örebro is particularly interesting when it comes to projectification, as it consciously avoids the term project, but still ends up initiating and (implicitly) promoting project organizations. Both Örebro and Norrköping have been and still are important for the diffusion and implementation of social investment work in local government around Sweden, and are important for the proliferation of the project logic. Consequently, I will now briefly describe these municipalities' practices as part of the institutional social investment infrastructure, and as promoters of the project logic.

### **Norrköping**

When Lars Stjärnquist, a former party secretary of the Social Democrats, and a rather famous politician in Norrköping, was asked to describe their social investment fund, he started by describing Norrköping a few years back as a city in which a growing number of citizens felt excluded, were permanently unemployed, and where a large number of people had no further education beyond elementary school (Field trip notes, October 2014). He argued that they knew this, but did not know how to deal with it, or which methods to use. He described how he turned to Ingvar Nilsson and to representatives of the SKL to discuss these matters. He wanted to measure the municipal work in terms of economic resources. "We do not think of money enough," he argued, "if we were to think more in terms of what the things we do cost," he continued, "then we could afford to do more!" (*ibid.*).

In 2010, Norrköping had a budgetary surplus and that gave them, according to Stjärnquist, the opportunity to put money aside and regard it as an investment. Their idea was to calculate the effects of these investments as they calculated the effects from other investments, within the harder policy areas, and tangible assets such as roads or buildings, etc. After discussion with the SKL and Ingvar Nilsson, Stjärnquist turned to the financial officer in Norrköping, and asked him to develop an administrative tool to handle this. The fund initially had SEK 40 million.

However, installing a social investment fund was according to some local government officials rather foolish. The financial officer in Norrköping described how he presented the social investment fund at a local government conference in 2010. There he got the reaction from the audience that “it was the most stupid thing they had ever heard, it was irresponsible, and it was unscientific” (Field trip notes, October 2014). The idea of a local government treating social initiatives as investments in the same way it treats investments in tangible assets, appeared to be too crazy for the conference attendees.

Despite the harsh critique, or perhaps to some extent even because of it, they continued their work and implemented a social investment fund. When I visited Norrköping in 2014 along with a local government social investment network, it appeared as if Norrköping wanted to come off as rebellious, doing something few others dared to do.<sup>21</sup> The Norrköping initiative also received a great deal of attention in the national media (Hultkrantz & Vimefall, 2017).

As a testament to their rebellious character, Norrköping was also one of the first municipalities to initiate a Social Impact Bond (SIB) in 2016, something that might be described as a further development of the social investment perspective. An SIB is an agreement between an investor, a (public or private) service provider and a public-sector agency—in this case, the municipality of Norrköping—in which the public agency makes payments to the project only when outcomes (public sector savings) are achieved. Internationally, SIBs have been a way for public-sector agencies to attract private capital to various activities. The idea behind the “Swedish SIB” has been to aim private capital toward specific target groups in the public sector, and allow any actor to compete in terms of the performance of the intended services (Backström, 2014). In addition to Norrköping, Klippan (one of the municipalities in the network mentioned above) also had an SIB as of late 2016.

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<sup>21</sup> Even though Nynäshamn apparently had done similar work since 2006 (Jatko, 2014.).

It should also be noted that Ingvar Nilsson has been important for the contextualization of the concept in Sweden, and was involved in Klippan's as well as Norrköping's SIB.

When describing key ingredients in Norrköping's social investment fund, Lars Stjärnquist emphasizes two things (Field trip notes, 2014). First, that the fund has to be designed as a refund system in which funding for new projects comes from the returns from previous projects, and secondly, that one needs to challenge the fear of questions regarding the budget among the employees. Hultkranz and Vimefall (2017) describe the refund model in Norrköping with an example: If the social investment fund provides the money for a school project "targeting potential high-school drop-outs, this is expected to reduce the expenditure needs for the social services in the coming years, so budget resources can then be reallocated" from such projects to the social investment fund (p. 90). For such a system to work "one must measure the effects and evaluate so we know that what we do has the intended effects" (Stjärnquist, Field trip notes, 2014). Related to this is the municipal economy which often is considered to be an enemy. However, "social service employees or teachers, etc. should not consider the municipal economy an obstacle but a weapon to defend their practices and profession" (*ibid.*).

Similar to other local government's social investment funds (SKL, 2015), Norrköping's fund aims to invest early in people's lives to prevent negative development for individuals and thereby avoid future municipal costs. Also, similar to other municipalities, Norrköping has requirements for inter-organizational collaboration as well as implementation of successful projects in the ordinary organization. As such, the ordinary budgets are to make room for those "new" activities if successful. The person responsible for the social investment fund argues that the funds grant the civil servants more freedom to work long-term and bridge the administrative boundaries (Field trip notes, 2014).

In 2017, Norrköping had five projects up and running, and compared to Eslöv, the projects were a lot bigger in terms of resources. Two of the projects had a budget of approximately SEK 12 million (compared to SEK 2 million for the entire social investment budget in Eslöv). The ideas for the projects in Norrköping appeared to come from other municipalities. For example, Norrköping has a "Skolfam" project, a project found in 26 other municipalities including Örebro. This is, however, not regarded as problematic, but viewed as

an asset— already tried out and evaluated projects serve as ready-made solutions.

## Örebro

Just a few years after Norrköping, Örebro also initiated a social investment fund. The background to their social investment fund was that a municipal councilor starting to talk about a “soft” investment budget with the ambition to match investments made in the “harder” policy areas. The argument was that they ought to view social policies and practices as being investments, much in the same way as they viewed the building of a road or a house as an investment and not a cost. This was in 2010—around the same time that Norrköping initiated their social investment fund—and three years later guidelines for a social investment fund in Örebro were approved by the city council.

We didn’t know that much back then, and there were only Norrköping and Umeå before us,<sup>22</sup> but they really just had some pure project funds. But a unanimous city council voted yes to our social investment fund of SEK 65 million (Field trip notes, 2016).

According to the person responsible for the social investment fund—a person in her early 30s with a background in public health—the funds came from pension refunds (from AFA) in 2012, money that was received by many municipalities that year.<sup>23</sup> Several interrelated events made the social investment fund possible. The political will to do something related to “soft” investments, inspiration from Norrköping and Umeå, and the suddenly available money, paved the way for a social investment fund in Örebro.

In 2017, the fund consisted of approximately SEK 120 million, and aimed to intervene early in people’s lives to avoid future municipal costs. Like other municipalities, its social investment fund also requires the projects to be collaborative, innovative, based on scientific evidence, and that successful projects are implemented. According to the civil servant responsible, the success factors have been the interested politicians, a committed financial officer, the

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<sup>22</sup> Note that Nynäshamn was in fact also before Örebro, but did not call its initiative a social investment fund.

<sup>23</sup> AFA Insurance is an organization owned by Sweden's labor market parties.

inclusion of civil society organizations and a clear application procedure (Field trip notes, 2016).

Applications to the social investment fund are formulated as a project plan in which one specifies the problem, the target groups, methods to be used, a time line, a budget, a plan for implementation, and activity measurements (Örebro guidelines for social investments, 2016). One of the project managers indicated that parts of their procedure were similar to their ordinary monitoring system, in which they report on a frequent basis in terms of efficacy and activity measurements (Interview, project manager, 2016).

In the fall of 2017, nine projects had been initiated, although they were not called projects. An informal decision has been made to call them efforts (*insatser*) and not projects in order to avoid negative connotations related to the term project:

The organization associates projects with something that ends ... so it is a way to signal that this is something that doesn't start and finish within a certain time (Quote from fieldtrip notes, 2016).

Compared to other municipalities, the “efforts” are quite substantial in terms of money (SKL, 2015). One of the efforts in Örebro is a three-year investment called “*Bryggan—från destruktiv frånvaro till måluppfyllelse*” (The Bridge—from destructive absence to goal achievement). “Bryggan” has a total budget of approximately SEK 12 million (compared to Eslöv’s entire social investment budget of SEK 2 million), and engages six full time employees from the departments of preschools and secondary schools, social services, and education and work. The department for social services is involved in almost all projects, and the department for preschool and school, as well as the department for livelihood, education and work, are involved in several projects.

Even though the term project is to be avoided, the terms “project owner” and “project manager” are used (they have not found a good replacement for these terms, according to the civil servant responsible). Each “effort” has a specific project owner responsible for the overall results of the investment, and to ensure the implementation of favorable results. Each effort also has a specific project manager responsible for being on time, on budget, and within the project scope.

Each project in Örebro has a project manager to 25%. A social investment project manager in Örebro does not necessarily need detailed

knowledge about the daily project operations, but is supposed to enable and facilitate those activities. In that sense, there is a bit of a distance between the project team and the project manager. The project manager is to be knowledgeable first and foremost in project management and does not have to have experience with the work carried out in the project. The person responsible for the social investment fund argued that “a project manager ought to be neutral and objective in relation to the projects, otherwise you can’t be critical or report deviations” (Field trip notes, 2016). The role of project manager—as described by one project manager—is to:

enable others to do their job according to a project plan, to enable access to different places, to the schools, the library, family centers and so on, and if that doesn’t work I have to contact the executive managers at those departments ... I also promote and market the project and develop marketing materials and posters, etc. (Interview, project manager, 2016).

One civil servant describes how she was employed full time as a project manager managing several projects, each at 25%. At the same time, she also functioned as a project entrepreneur, looking for possible new projects. She was assigned to a specific geographical area in Örebro, an area described as struggling with socioeconomic problems. She was placed there as a resource, she says, helping the local departments working there to realize their expressed objectives:

...they have a lot of ideas but no resources or time to concretize them. A lot of work is needed since collaboration between several departments is required, so that was the reason for installing my position as project manager there (Interview, project manager, 2016).

The project manager describes how she talks to people working in the area, at schools, the library, kindergarten, etc., and from that formulates ideas together with a group of executive managers from different departments. These ideas then could be eligible for funding from the social investment fund. Her employment was funded by the social investment fund, and she was seen as an investment in the area. At the same time, she worked to further materialize projects through the social investment fund. She seems to have a mediating role between the departments and the people working in the area on one hand, and the social investment fund on the other.

There is also a workshop group consisting of representatives from each department meeting on a regular basis to discuss possible ideas and suggestions for appropriate “efforts.” The project manager quoted above argues that “...the whole essence of the social investment fund [is] that we do not do more of what we already have, but we do it differently” (Interview, project manager, Örebro, 2016). The fact that the activities are organized as projects also enhances the visible character of the work and furthers the relationship between civil servants and politicians:

One doesn't just go to the politicians [and] the politicians do not really demand anything from the ordinary operations, I would say. Or, perhaps they do at the department head level.... You are quite far from politics if one is not head of a department [...but with] a clearly defined development work, called a project, it is more okay to show up, and to spread [the project] and all that (Interview, project manager, Örebro, 2016).

The project manager compares the visible character of her work and the relationship with politicians when working as project manager, and her work as an “ordinary” civil servant. She argues that her project work gets more attention, and that it at least gives her the potential for a stronger relationship with politicians than does her ordinary work.

### **Summary of social investments in Sweden**

The practical outlets, in Sweden, of the social investment perspective have thus far mainly been the initiation of social investment funds—as project funding systems—in local and regional governments. As an association representing and acting on local government's behalf, the SKL plays an important part in the development of, advocacy for, and diffusion of social investment work and social investment funds. Together with the SKL, Norrköping and Örebro function as social investment front runners, constantly subjected to field trips from other municipalities wanting to learn from their experiences. One may describe the social investment reports, the social investment conferences, the municipal front runners, the social investment models and techniques, and the diffusion of project ideas between municipalities as parts of a social investment community or institutional infrastructure. Through the eyes of local government projectification, this infrastructure reinforces the reliance upon the



project logic since the activities, although aimed at social investment, at the same time promote the project logic characteristics of innovation, collaboration and a break with bureaucratic procedures.

In the following section, I will describe social investment practices in Eslöv, and how those are influenced by—but also part of the creation of—the social investment community described above.

## Social investment in Eslöv

Since June 2012, Eslöv has had a program for sustainable social development, and a social investment budget was installed to implement the objectives of that program in 2013. The idea with the budget is to cover initial costs for organizational development, increase cross-sector collaboration, and make use of good ideas in the organization (Welfare program, 2015,2013). To receive funding from the social investment budget, the initiative must be a collaborative endeavor between at least two departments, it should be innovative, engage in one of the three prioritized objectives, lead to long-term effects, and be built upon reliable scientific or practice-based evidence. These requirements are similar to the requirements in Örebro and Norrköping, and also the requirements promoted by the SKL (SKL, 2015).

The investment budget was initiated at the beginning of 2013, and has SEK 2 million for each year earmarked for project activities. Compared to other municipalities, this is a rather small social investment budget, and as a result, the projects are smaller in terms of resources. Since the fund's beginning, approximately 20 projects have been initiated with funding from that budget. These are all welfare projects "aiming to promote organizational development, capture good ideas out in the organization and to encourage cross-sector collaboration and cross-sector working methods" ([www.eslov.se](http://www.eslov.se), 2017b). According to the city manager (Interview, city manager, 2015), the social investment budget is to function as an economic injection in the departments to overcome initial costs for organizational development. She describes how the idea with the budget is to allow departments to make resources available for a limited amount of time to focus on the task of developing different methods, and then implementing these in ordinary practices (*ibid.*). Anyone employed in the organization, after approval from the closest executive, may apply for funding from the investment budget (Interview, public health strategist, 2014).

A committee, placed directly under the city council, and consisting of administrative managers, then reviews and prepares the applications for a final decision to be made by the City Council. This organizational structure of a centrally-located committee with representatives from each department responsible for the budget is the same in Norrköping and Örebro, and also is advocated by the SKL as good practice.

## Background

When asked why Eslöv developed a social investment budget, all my interviewees referred to Ingvar Nilsson:

We were well over 200 people from the organization listening to him, and it was almost like a revival meeting. He is so sensible, so extremely wise, so when walking out of there, many of us said we really need to get this going here (Interview, city council chairwoman, March, 2014).

The comparison with a revival meeting is striking, since Ingvar Nilsson has traveled the country the last 20 years “preaching” the word of social investment. In addition to talks such as the one in Eslöv, he is frequently asked to participate in conferences, is part of (and has been involved in) several projects aiming to develop methods for municipal social investment work, and he has worked as a consultant conducting socio-economic calculations for many organizations. About the same time that Ingvar Nilsson visited Eslöv (early 2012), the executive managers from all departments in Eslöv visited a meeting where the financial manager from the city of Norrköping spoke about the initiation of their social investment fund. During this time, Eslöv also hired a new public health strategist. The confluence of Ingvar Nilsson’s influence, the inspiration from Norrköping, the hiring of a new public health strategist, as well as a rather new program for sustainable social development in need of activities, all appears to have been important for the initiation of the social investment budget.

We talked in the welfare committee [the organizational unit responsible for the social investment budget] on how to implement the policy [the program for sustainable social development]. We all had experience of working with overarching “plans of action” prescribed from above and did not want that kind of top-down perspective. The public health specialists are out in the organization

at different departments. That is where we find the primary knowledge. So, we were all in agreement about wanting a bottom-up perspective. Then it all fell into place and it seemed natural: our bottom-up perspective, the seminar held by Ingvar Nilsson and the inspiration from Norrköping. The idea with a social investment fund seemed so obvious, when the idea came from so many different sources at the same time. So, we gave the politicians a proposal to connect a social investment fund to the policy [program] for social sustainability (Interview, public health strategist, 2014).

When the public health strategist (the person responsible for the social investment budget), described the background to the budget, it was as if no other alternative was possible—everything was pointing in this direction. During my time in Eslöv (roughly five years), there were three different public health strategists (due to parental leave), all female, all in their 30s and all with a university degree in public health. They were very dedicated to issues regarding public health. They were also outgoing and networking civil servants not just within their organizations, since they spent much time discussing and meeting employees from different departments, but also since they engaged in field trips, conferences, seminars and meetings with other local, regional and national social investment actors.

The welfare committee in Eslöv, consisting of the public health strategist and the head of each department, saw the initiation of a social investment budget as a way to, at least partly, meet the objectives of the program for sustainable social development. Hence, the committee proposed to the city council that Eslöv should initiate a social investment budget in order to deliver on the program. A positive decision was taken by the City council in November 2012 (KS.2013.0245).

### **Setting up a social investment budget**

A lot of emphasis was placed upon economic issues and administrative technicalities when it came to setting up the social investment budget in Eslöv, and this seems to have been the case also in other municipalities (See SKL, 2015; Hultkrantz, 2015;2016). There is even a national network of municipal finance managers and economists meeting on a regular basis to discuss financial and administrative issues surrounding social investment funds—a network of which Eslöv is a part. The considerable interest from economists and finance

managers in social investment funds is perhaps not that surprising, since an investment perspective on social activities entails new practices for municipal accounting and budgeting. An activity that before was handled as a cost in budgets and financial accounts was now to be understood as an investment, just like investments in tangible assets such as buildings and machinery. Far from every economist has been happy about this development:

When this came, [the idea of social investment funds] it turned the stomach of all economists. Someone argued that it was illegal...Investments are traditionally related to something which is to be held permanently, as it is stated in the law. So, when you do this kind of soft allocation and invest in those kind of, you know, could we really call that an investment? This was something really difficult for the entire economy profession to digest. [But at the same time...] everyone appeared to agree that this must be done (Interview, quality controller in Eslöv, 2014).

The finance manager in Eslöv is one of those economists who have struggled with the social investment perspective and the idea of a municipality holding a fund. He argues that a municipality cannot hold a fund due to municipal accounting regulations (Interview, finance manager, June 17, 2014). For this reason, their “fund” is referred to as a social investment “budget,” and is a regular post in the ordinary budget, financed like other activities through tax revenues and general government grants (*ibid.*). The finance manager in Eslöv managed to convince the organization not to initiate a fund, but to allocate specific funds for social investment activities within the ordinary budget.

The difference is that the funding in the social investment budget is designated to project activities, and this is quite a significant difference from what the ordinary budgets allows. A social investment budget, or fund, is a project-funding system aiming to fund specific types of projects. In Eslöv, as in all other municipalities with a social investment fund, the project system has specific requirements of what a social investment project is. Eslöv, like most municipalities relies on the SKL when defining what a social investment project is and what criteria it should meet. According to the SKL, a social investment is: a temporary prevention initiative aimed at children and the young; a collaborative endeavor; based on evidence; should be evaluable; and must be clearly defined and demarcated (SKL, 2012).

As stated, the idea with a social investment budget was to allow and to encourage ideas coming from “outside the box” and not be restricted by ordinary budgets and practices. However, as just described, the social investment budget in Eslöv appeared to be rather strictly regulated by the ordinary budget. And Eslöv is not unique in that matter. Even in municipalities in which they claim to have a fund (and not “just” a budget), the ordinary budget appears to be ruling. In Malmö, for instance, a municipality with two social investment funds of SEK 50 million each, the city council put their social investment funds on hold in 2014 due to municipal budgetary setbacks—in practice, no projects were allowed to start unless they were fully financed within the ordinary budget (Meeting minutes, 2014). A similar scenario occurred in Örebro in 2016, when their social investment fund was put on hold (Field trip notes, 2016). The municipal one-year budgets have a strong hold on all municipal activities, and their reinforcement of traditional and transactional systems makes it difficult to proceed toward ideals based on social investments (see Wällstedt & Almqvist, 2017). One civil servant in Malmö called their social investment fund “a social investment fund dressed in the usual local government suit” (Interview, civil servant, 2014).

The direct connection to the regular budget also entails a risk of not being prioritized the coming year. One civil servant in Eslöv talked about the connection to the regular budget and the difficulties of working long-term in project activities:

If there is no immediate result, we might get canceled. It is hard to work long-term within the ordinary budget and even harder to do so in the form of a project, when it is even more related to specific funds in a one-time initiative (Interview, civil servant, 2014).

Regardless of whether the social investments are funded by a “fund” or a “budget” it finances project activities, and that is money that prior to the social investment funds/budgets was used to fund “ordinary” municipal social welfare or public-health-related work.

### **The alternative?**

Before initiating the social investment budget, Eslöv worked with “plans of action” in their work related to social sustainable development and public

health. These plans are described as top-down, bureaucratic strategies for implementation, while the investment budget is put forward as a bottom-up strategy (Interview, public health strategist, 2014). The top-down strategies used before were difficult to find support for: “it was hard to get real access to the different departments within the municipality and encourage them to do something specific when the ideas were not theirs” (ibid.). At first, the welfare committee discussed the possibility of initiating three different plans of action—one for each objective in the program for sustainable social development—but they all agreed to work more bottom-up this time.

The welfare committee uses the social investment budget to gain access to the different departments, and as a governing strategy. They do not simply ask the departments to do something, via plans of action, but offer them funding. This funding attracts action, and these actions can be controlled via specific social investment criteria.

The public health strategist argues that the idea behind the social investment budget is to let employees apply for funding, and said she had been “traveling” the entire organization promoting the possibilities that the investment budget provides:

We were keen to retain this way of working so we put a lot of effort into marketing the social investment budget, wrote on the intranet, met all the executive managers and wrote and communicated the possibility of applying for funding within specific areas (Interview, public health strategist, 2014).

The promotion of the social investment budget has paid off. According to the city manager (Interview, April 2014), issues related to social sustainability and public health are more prioritized now than before, due to the investment budget. The transformation from plans-of-action to a project funding system has made these issues more visible, and perhaps is thereby also perceived as more attractive.

### **The projects**

During its first year, the welfare committee received 14 and approved eight project applications, and as of this date (Autumn 2017), approximately 20 projects in total have been approved. These are all projects initiated by civil servants at the management level (public health strategist, March 7, 2014;

www.eslov.se, 2017). Each project has a project manager and, depending on the size of the project, a project team. Each project also has a steering group in which the head of each involved department participates, along with the public health strategist responsible for the social investment budget. One of the department heads also functions as project owner—the one responsible for the application. This organizational set-up is a prerequisite of the social investment budget. In order to receive money, a steering group is required. All projects are also required to continuously report to the welfare committee and to provide an evaluation report at the end of the project. When the projects receive funds, the people involved are strongly encouraged and given the opportunity to take a project management course in which an internally-developed project model is introduced.

The content of the projects differs somewhat, but all are related to sustainable social development or public health. Five of the projects can be described as located in the education sector, aiming to develop different methods for children and young adults, and four projects are more closely related to social services and health care. One example of a project within the educational system is a project called The Breakfast Club, in which the students at upper secondary schools were offered breakfast eight times during one semester and lectures and discussions about the consumption of energy drinks, sleep, breakfast habits and the use of addictive substances were also held. Another example was a project in which fourth graders tried out different sports or creative activities during a scheduled hour each week. An example from the social services was a project aiming to support families in which one or both parents have cognitive difficulties. The project manager for that project describes the background as coming from the identification of one specific family with four young kids in which both parents had cognitive difficulties: “They [the family] had 34 different contacts with people in the municipality and in the health care sector and no coordinated support” (Interview, civil servant/project manager, 2015). On the basis of that problem, a project was created to map out how many of these families there are in Eslöv, to develop staff training material, and also to establish cooperation with the municipality in Uppsala, which has a method developed in-house to work with these issues (www.eslov.se, 2016).

When the project owners (the department heads) were asked by the public health strategist to describe how their projects came about, several of them referred to other projects in other municipalities as inspiration (Internal

follow-up report, 2016). In chapter 5, we found project ideas originating from other organizations to be a common feature in Eslöv as well as in other municipalities, and the social investment projects are no exceptions. Only two social investment projects in Eslöv refer to ideas originating from civil servants in one of the departments involved (*ibid.*) and a similar scenario was found in Örebro as well as Norrköping.

### **Too few or too many projects?**

Regarding the content of the projects funded by the social investment budget in Eslöv, the public health strategist described how the welfare committee initially was concerned about not getting any applications at all from the employees:

...we learned from Norrköping's mistake. They started out with SEK 30 million but received only two project proposals due to high demands on specific features of the project proposals with socio-economic calculations for instance. We did not want to put such restrictions on our departments (Interview, public health strategist, March 7, 2014).

While Norrköping strictly defined what a social investment is, and what such initiatives should be, Eslöv took a less firm approach and used a wider definition of social investment to attract more applications—i.e., more projects. As one of the civil servants from the social investment committee in Eslöv concluded, one effect of this has been that they received, and approved, project proposals “that weren't 100% social investment projects.” He explains:

If we take the calculating investment model that Ingvar Nilsson puts forward—if we initiate a specific effort now, we save this and that later, it is not applicable to any of our projects. The same goes for a lot of other municipalities and their projects.... How do you measure the socio-economic benefits of young people eating more breakfast?... What we do is to set aside money for the benefit of a socially sustainable development. Even if we do it under the flag of social investments, it really is something rather different (Interview, civil servant, 2014).



What a social investment is and what kind of projects the municipality should support is—and has since the beginning of the social investment budget in Eslöv been—subject to a continuous discussion in the welfare committee (Field notes, 2015). The public health strategist, chairman of the group, described how they were torn between, on the one hand, focusing on fewer, larger projects, perhaps with better chances of influencing ordinary work or, on the other hand, focusing on more, smaller projects to support wider engagement and creativity in the organization (Interview, public health specialist, 2015). The investment budget in Eslöv started out with many smaller projects, but for 2017, fewer and bigger projects were endorsed, all because other municipalities appeared to be doing that, according to the public health strategist. She referred in that context to a conference she had attended in which municipalities gathered to discuss social investment funds.

Since the social investment phenomenon is relatively new, the municipalities are left to learn from each other, and different kinds of networks and conferences are organized in order to facilitate learning.

### **Implementation and responsibility for organizational learning**

Since the social investment budget in Eslöv is quite small in terms of money (SEK 2 million per year) most people are involved part time in the projects. However, the projects are expected to make a difference and/or change something in the ordinary, permanent, organization via the implementation of good results. The implementation of results appears so far to be quite limited, and mostly concerns the exchange of information. In an internal follow-up report, it is stated that project managers continuously inform relevant stakeholders about the projects, and that is viewed as an important part of implementation (Follow-up report, 2016). In the follow-up report, one of the projects argues that the transfer of knowledge from the project to the permanent organization appears first when the project ends and the project members return to their ordinary work (*ibid.*). The civil servants involved in the projects, especially the project managers, are described in the report as an important part of project success and implementation: “The project manager has been of great importance for this project” one project owner argued, and two other project owners referred to their project managers as “project enthusiasts” (*eldsjälar*) who, to a great deal, were responsible for the project’s success (*ibid.*).

Responsibility for what happens with the results of these projects was placed upon the project managers. One civil servant described how organizational learning and discussions on how to take care of project results were left to him, who, according to him, had no ability or authority to initiate or decide upon how to take care of the results (Interview, project manager, February 2016). He argued—and referred to an external evaluation (Evaluation, 2016) of the social investment budget to back him up—that the “implementation processes and the learning processes has been handed over from the project owners to the project managers and the projects” (Interview, project manager, February 2016.). The project owners do not necessarily disagree. One of the project owners argued for the importance of “putting the projects close to the ordinary activities in the natural processes of change so that the ordinary activities could absorb lessons learned in the project” (Follow-up report, 2016). Another project owner described how he had “moved the responsibility regarding processes of implementation to the [civil servants involved].” Despite the collaborative nature of all social investment projects, the implementation of the results was left to each department:

...as an individual department and as a head of that department, I have no ability to influence other departments and how those are governed, controlled or how they prioritize in their budgets. The way the municipality is organized and structured makes it difficult to push collaborative projects through. It all comes down to “who pays?” (Respondent to internal follow-up, 2016).

The social investment projects are all collaborations between two or more departments, but project ownership is always assigned to one of the departments—the one responsible for applying for the funding. The role as project owner is a tricky, since the head of one department does not necessarily have any authority over the other collaborating departments. During a project, a common economic resource is used—money from the social investment fund. However, as the project ends and the results are to be implemented in ordinary activities at each department, their own resources are to be used, and that may cause some problems. The project owner in one department may have little chance of changing something in another department’s budgets, for instance. If the project is a success, but would demand the employment of new staff (or prolonging the employment of project staff) in several departments to continue the work, each department must make these decisions and make these priorities

in its own budget. According to the civil servant quoted above, discussions of budget priorities and issues of implementation were left to each department. In the follow-up report (2016), several project owners described how collaboration between civil servants at different levels during the projects worked fine. However, when the resources ended—when the project ended—collaboration ended.

When asked whether they would apply for more funding from the social investment budget in the future, eight out of nine project owners answered that they would be happy to do so, and three of them had already done so (Follow-up report, 2016). Despite difficulties with implementing project results and making the collaboration last, the creation of new projects was tempting.

### **Politically interesting and visible, but also vulnerable**

Even though the social investment projects appear to be of political interest in Eslöv, and given quite a lot of attention, the person responsible for the social investment budget feels obliged to deliver specific results, preferably in terms of numbers or financial resources, in order to avoid cancelation:

I feel some kind of pressure to measure effects because everyone is talking so much about it, and I'm wondering how long we can talk about 'learning' and 'the development of our organization' to the politicians. Perhaps they won't prioritize our social investment budget, and perhaps they think it doesn't lead to anything and that they then could use the money for something else instead (Interview, public health strategist, 2015).

Along with the package of organizing the social investment budget as a project funding system comes not only ideas of innovation and a break from bureaucratic procedures, but also the notions of measurement, control and evaluation. Since activities organized as projects are bound in time with a clear beginning and end, they readily become targets for evaluation. However, the starting point for the social investment budget in Eslöv appears to have been ideas of innovation and taking action differently than before in terms of issues of social sustainability and public health rather than evaluation or measurement. It was a political decision brought on after the "revival meeting" with Ingvar Nilsson at which more than 200 Eslöv employees attended. Coming out from that meeting, the chairwoman of the city council argued that this was

something Eslöv must have. The timing appeared to be right for action to be taken, and Nilsson presented the problems (a complex society with complex problems, a fragmented welfare apparatus, and increasing costs for social services) as well as the solution: a social investment fund.

The political interest in these issues is rather high. The matters now designated for the social investment budget used to be matters for specific boards (different boards depending on the issue). But with the investment budget, these are now discussed at meetings with the city council. Hence, the political interest in work related to social sustainability and public-health-related work has increased along with the social investment budget. However, as the public health strategist points out, the extra attention given also has its down sides. More visibility and attention equals more pressure to deliver, to measure and control what is delivered, and to present it in an appealing manner.

### **A regional social investment network**

Ever since the initiation of the social investment budget in Eslöv, the public health strategist responsible for the budget has been part of a network, or a thematic group as they call it. This group consists of representatives from six municipalities in the region of Skåne, one representative from the Skåne association of local authorities (Kfsk), one representative from the county administrative board of Skåne (one of Sweden's 21 counties) and two representatives from Region Skåne (the county council).<sup>24</sup> The group meets on a regular basis to discuss common interests, problems and solutions relating to the social investment funds administrated by each municipality and the region. They also organize seminars, conferences, field trips, and apply for and engage in development projects together. The people involved in the thematic group are all in their early 30s, and most of them have a degree in public health and are employed at a strategic level in their organization.

Each municipality involved in the network—and Region Skåne as well—has a social investment fund/budget. The amount of money allocated for each fund differs (between SEK 2 and 20 million), but they all bear the same characteristics: the idea of early investment in people's lives to avoid future costs; the requirement for projects to be innovative; the requirement for investments aimed at long-term effects; and the practical outlet of the funds are

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<sup>24</sup> The municipalities involved are: Trelleborg, Klippan, Ystad, Tomelilla, Malmö, and Eslöv.

projects! One thing that does differ between the funds is who is eligible to apply for funding. In Eslöv, only civil servants employed in the municipality may apply. In Region Skåne, as well as in Ystad and Malmö, civil society organizations may apply as well, provided there is some collaboration with the municipality or the region. In Eslöv, civil society organizations are allowed to participate in the projects, but are not allowed to apply for funding or “own” a project.

Another common feature in the thematic group is that the initiation of each social investment fund was influenced by Ingvar Nilsson, and was also a political initiative. They all share stories of politicians eager to initiate a social investment fund, but sometimes the enthusiasm appears to have been just an interest in doing something, perhaps to demonstrate action, or just to do what others are doing. Region Skåne eagerly initiated a social investment fund, but according to the civil servant responsible for it, they did not quite know what to do with it:

No one knew quite what was decided on. I was asked to formulate something in relation to the fund, with criteria, prerequisites and how it could function. But, once you've worked for as long as I have you know that if you write something like this you'll end up managing it as well, so I wanted a system I could manage.... The term 'fund' is problematic in a municipal context. You can't allocate money in a fund, as sometimes described. But you can set money aside in a project, and that is one of the reasons for choosing projects as the organizational model. If you have a project spanning across three years, it is possible to set money aside for that specific project and by doing so make the money untouchable for others (Interview, Region Skåne strategist, Dec, 2015).

The fund was designed by one lone civil servant, and his focus was a manageable fund organized through projects. In comparison with most municipal social investment funds, Region Skåne's fund aims to support social investment activities in “other” organizations, not in the organizational departments of Region Skåne itself. Their fund reminds one more of the EU funds than the municipal funds. Much like the EU funds, Region Skåne also has a project management support system consisting of civil servants aiding projects and project teams regarding issues of planning, analysis, assessment, monitoring and evaluation (Interview, PM support, 2016).

## Conferences and networks

The thematic group “markets” the use of social investment funds, especially in the southern parts, of Sweden but also at a national level. When the group organized a conference in 2014 in Tomelilla, a small town in Skåne, more than 160 people from local, regional, and national authorities attended. Some of these were politicians (about 12%), some public managers (about 20%) and about 50% of them described themselves as civil servants in a municipality (Conference evaluation, 2014).

At the conference, the thematic group described their work, but they also invited the previously mentioned consultant, Ingvar Nilsson, to hold a guest lecture, as well as a representative from the SKL. Nilsson talked about the importance of “early interventions,” but also about the many good projects he had come across in the municipalities. At the same time, he was concerned about the heavy “operational focus,” and the “lack of strategical focus,” in the municipalities. He argued that the local projects should be assessed based on what impact they have on a societal level, in terms of socio-economic gains (Field notes from conference, 2014). The representative from SKL also mentioned the many examples of good projects across the country, but he emphasized the importance of knowledge dissemination and called for a “library of efficient interventions” from which municipalities could “borrow” project ideas that had already been tested and evaluated.<sup>25</sup> Also at the conference was a Swedish sociology professor, Lennart Svensson, talking about how public sector organizations are good when it comes to organizing projects and reaching immediate outcomes, but how they often lack the ability to go beyond the termination of single projects and achieve long-term effects (*ibid.*).

The overall theme of the conference was social investment, and the talks all had a social investment perspective, but they also shared an underlying assumption of projects as unavoidable. No alternatives to projects as organizational solutions were up for discussion. Projects were presented as something to be handled in different ways. Public organizations ought to be more efficient when organizing projects, and evaluate them with a socioeconomic and/or a long-term effect perspective. Project results and project ideas, as a result of social investment funds, were also to be shared and diffused

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<sup>25</sup> He mentioned <http://investinginchildren.eu/> as an example of such a “library,” where evidence-based practices are listed as ready to be used interventions.

to a wider audience (Field notes from conference, 2014). The project logic was highly present, but not explicit.

The conferences, such as the one in Tomelilla, also show how mobile the civil servants involved in this kind of work are, and how eager they are to learn from others and/or to share their own best practices. These are not local government employees operating only within their own organizations or in the geographic confines of their municipality, but mobile civil servants. I attended two such conferences, and the civil servants presenting at these were all in their early 30s, and appeared to be dedicated people involved in social-service- related work or public health.

## Summary

The main message in this chapter is that local government social investment practices are equated with projects, and encourage the project logic through an institutional infrastructure held together by networks, conferences, consultants and project ideas. The social investment perspective requires translation to fit the municipal environment, which entails transformation of ordinary organizations and working procedures, and an adaptation to the project logic.

The social investment budget in Eslöv is a project funding system, and as such supports and advocates for projects as an organizational solution, and project management as a desirable civil servant skill. The system is set up accordingly, and adapted to project management principles including: specific demands on organizations (collaboration, innovation etc.); standardized application procedures; competition between project proposals; and demands for evaluation. These are organizational principles that differ compared to ordinary operations, and when applied entail a transformation of practices associated with sustainable social development and public health to those of the project. Surrounding the projects are also ordinary operations adapting to handle the transformed procedures in accordance with the project logic.

As policy fields, sustainable social development and public health stretch all the way from the more technical departments of the municipality into the “softer” policy areas and are something that, at least in theory, permeate the entire organization. However, the bulk of the social investment projects have been located mainly within the “softer” departments. A transformation of sustainable social development practices in Eslöv from ordinary operations to

project organizations means more projects, but also fewer ordinary (permanent) operations.

Some of the social investment projects appear to have been what I call organizational “add-ons,” meaning something that the organization would not have done without the social investment funds. However, there were also projects aimed at activities that the organization must carry out—their mandatory services, activities they would have done anyway with or without the social investment funds. In fact, the three most common areas for social investment applications in all Swedish local governments are the fields of social services, education and work and livelihood, according to the national survey (SKL, 2015)—fields very much at the core of local government practices. Social investment projects do not just “add” activities to local governments, but transform parts of their mandatory services, such as pre-school, school and social services, into projects and require them to adapt to a project funding system as well.

Also adding to the projectification process is that few municipalities—including Eslöv, Örebro and Norrköping—have a plan for implementing successful projects into ordinary work. In Eslöv, we also saw how the departments continued to express an eagerness to initiate more social investment projects despite the apparent difficulty of implementing results or reprioritizing budgets due to project outcomes. This shows the attractiveness of projects as an organizational solution, and the power of the project logic. However, implementation failure here also means that mandatory services, to some extent, are organized temporarily and are perpetually competing for funding. What we think of as the core services of local government are delivered, at least partly, through temporary solutions that requires funding that is available through systems of competition (the market logic).

The social investment funds in all Swedish municipalities are financial resources coming from within the municipalities, resources that they are free (more or less) to choose to do with as they please. So, to organize social investments as project funding systems is a conscious choice to transform parts of the “permanent” organization into “temporary” initiatives. Region Skåne, as well as the SKL and Örebro and Norrköping, argues for a social investment model in Swedish municipalities in which a centrally located, permanent, organizational unit with representatives from all departments is to be installed to handle the fund. In Eslöv, such an organizational unit is the welfare committee. The idea behind such an organization is to mainstream the social



investment perspective in the entire organization, but it is still to be organized as a project funding system. The project form, as a solution to social investment initiatives, becomes permanently available and also endorsed. Through such developments, project management skills are also further promoted as being important for civil servants wanting to, or assigned to, work with social investment and/or within social services, education, work and livelihood or public health.

The project and political logics coexist, and perhaps even work in favor of each other at events such as conferences or field trips. The bureaucratic logic is more present when it comes to the actual practices of local government social investment work. In order to become a local government practice, the social investment perspective had to adapt to the bureaucratic logic, be organized within the ordinary hierarchy, and, in most cases, be governed by the ordinary budget.

Projects also appear to equate to organizational development. An organization with no projects equals no development, and no organization want to be *that* organization. In all of the cases described above, political logic was imperative in the initiation and implementation of the social investment fund/budget. Civil servants, managers and politicians all wanted to do something different from what has been done before or that was different from ordinary activities. However, all cases also show the strength of the bureaucratic logic forcing the innovative and different ideas to adapt to its logic and organizational procedures. And even though the main rhetorical narrative surrounding social investment funds has innovative, collaborative and transformative connotations, the practical project outcomes appear to resonate more with the traditional perspective of “project as form” (Sahlin, 1995). Hence, emphasizing detailed planning, measurement and control meshes well with bureaucratic logic. Perhaps this is due to the fact that the political will to do something, and the social investment perspective, come from ideas influenced by activities within the “harder” policy areas and ideas of investments rather than costs.

The organizations, through social investment practices, become more reliant upon the project logic. Local governments invest in organizational structures and in the skills of civil servants as based on the project logic, and mobilize for future project organizations. And their work is encouraged, not just locally and by single civil servants, but by a regional, national and international context as well. At conferences, field trips and seminars, I met

dedicated civil servants, many of them in their early 30s, who were eager to meet and discuss social- investment-related issues with other civil servants. The problems at hand need to be dealt with differently than before (the political logic), and the conferences and field trips function as markets for available solutions. By placing political logic at center stage (and putting bureaucratic logic backstage), the focus at these events is placed on the problems at hand and the best practices for how to solve them. The best practices are also regarded as readily transferable between municipalities since they are “products” (of the project logic and the political logic) that not really consider the local government context and bureaucratic practices. Projects are viewed first and foremost as vehicles delivering good results, and not as devices producing specific effects of their own.

The whole social investment community appears to function as a system of acknowledgement in which people meet and reinforce each other’s beliefs in social investments as good practice. People involved in social investment work appear to be a rather young and mobile body of civil servants working not only across organizational borders within a municipality, but between municipalities as well.

When it comes to the diffusion of ideas and learning between municipalities, Ansell et al. (2017) describe Swedish local governments as “a small-world network with regional and hierarchical elements” (p. 903). In the case of social investment, I regard the “small-world network” as being comprised not just of close connections between municipal organizations, but an institutional infrastructure held together by:

- *Conferences*, at which civil servants from different municipalities meet each other and also discuss social-investment-related issues with regional and national authorities.
- *Networks*, organizing local as well as national conferences, seminars and meetings between local and regional actors, between specific professions such as public health strategists, and between economists.
- *Publications*, distributed first and foremost by the SKL, but promoted through conferences and networks.

- *Consultants*, the most famous and frequently hired being Ingvar Nilsson, but other social investment related consultants/researchers are also involved.
  
- And finally, as something that permeates the conferences, the networks, publications, and the workings of the consultants: *projects and project ideas* in the form of “good practices,” moving from one organization to the next, from one financier to another, and translating into different contexts, helping to keep the institutional social investment infrastructure together.



# Projectification as organizational capacity building

The preceding two empirical chapters have dealt with projectification as, on the one hand, an increasing reliance and proliferation of project organizations adding activities and resources to local government, and on the other hand, a transformation of activities from ordinary work to project work. In this chapter, we will take a closer look at the more subtle aspects of projectification: processes in which the project logic is spread and diffused in local government organizations not mainly through specific (manifest) projects, but through practices and agents that promote the project logic. These processes are the development of project models, the encouraging use of project methodology in “ordinary” work, the facilitation of project courses, and the growing importance of project capacity. However, there are also important specific agents promoting this development—not just civil servants, managers and politicians within local government, but also consultants, funding agencies and project funding systems, and regional public organizations promoting project funding possibilities.

The chapter ends with a discussion in which the empirical findings are related to earlier research and the theories presented in chapters 2 and 3; as with the preceding empirical chapters, the starting point is Eslöv.

## Trainee program and project management courses

Suddenly it all exploded—everybody started to talk about projects, even about things that were not projects, and that was great! (Interview, city manager, 2015).

This quote, from the city manager in Eslöv, illustrates my impression of the organization when I was first introduced to it. This was also one of the main reasons for choosing Eslöv as the starting point for my research. There was a

lot of talk about projects in Eslöv, and it seemed as if they talked about their daily operations in terms of projects: civil servants were referred to as project managers, ordinary activities had project plans, and there was talk about gatekeepers, steering groups and stakeholders—concepts usually associated with project management, and perhaps not so much with traditional bureaucratic local government.

When asked about the background to the seemingly heavy focus on projects, the city manager and the head of development described the development of a project model as particularly important in that process. The project model arose as a result of a trainee program implemented in the year 2000 was focused on finding future leaders within the organization.

In 2009, Eslöv became the first Swedish municipality to be certified according to a standard called Investors in People (IIP). According to Investors in People's webpage, their standard "defines what it takes to lead, support and manage people well for sustainable results" ([www.investorsinpeople.com](http://www.investorsinpeople.com), 2016). The consultant from IIP, working with the certification process in Eslöv, described how she worked to develop and display evidence of an organization with clear goals, documented strategies, employee involvement and a good environment for professional development (Interview, civil servant, 2016). This consultant was later headhunted by Eslöv to be their head of development, and one of her first tasks was to develop a trainee program in collaboration with a consulting firm to identify future leaders within the organization.

The trainee program led to several actions being taken by the municipality that edged it toward an increasing reliance on the project logic. First, the trainee program itself introduced project methodology as an important skill for future leaders of Eslöv. These skills, in turn, were carried by trainees to different parts of Eslöv. Even though not all of them became leaders in Eslöv, the bulk of them continued to work in the municipality. Secondly, those who applied but were not accepted to the trainee program were given a project management course. Third, a project model was developed and disseminated within the organization as a management tool/policy.

About 100 employees applied for the trainee program, and 20 of those were selected. During the program, a management group consisting of department heads gave the trainees different tasks relating to organizational development to solve.

Within the group [of trainees] it quickly became evident that there were no routines in the organization on how to work with questions of organizational development. (Interview, development strategist, 2013).

One of the trainees—later employed as a development strategist—described how the program exposed a lack of strategies, tools and methods to work with organizational development within the organization. He argued that the development of what later became a project model in Eslöv was a response to a vague organization with unclear decision-making procedures:

Before there was a committed civil servant carrying on by himself, or a group of civil servants driven by certain questions. We had one group engaged in youth policy and one about gender equality for instance, and these groups often had no mandate and vague, if any, official assignments. They initiated a lot of work but when presenting the results of their work to the executive managers the response was like: this is not what we wanted, we never asked for this and so on, and all this created a lot of frustration and negativity in the organization (Development strategist, November 29, 2013).

The head of development gave a similar account of the background to the project model, but added that the “decision-making procedures in the organization were ambiguous,” and that this was particularly evident when it came to organizational development and projects. Some sort of guidelines or routines on how to deal with those issues were requested, she argued (Interview, head of development, 2014), and this was when ideas of a project model became to emerge in the organization.

The development strategist talked about the project model as a solution to a fragmented organization in need of a significant re-organization, but without the energy and resources to implement it:

Organizationally, we are heading toward more hierarchy. This very flat organization does not function anymore. The society has changed and with that the demand for the opposite has been aroused. You want more hierarchy but at the same time to have influence on working procedures and the capacity to do something, and I think that the particular structure from the project has exactly that: clearly defined project owners, project leaders who lead distinct groups with defined tasks. [The project model] should act as a bridge between these two

systems. The project model is implemented in the old organization, because you do not want to change the organization, since organizational change is costly (Interview, development strategist, 2015).

The development strategist views the organizational principles of a project as something that can help an entire organization to achieve clarity and control. This is, according to him, the reason for Eslöv investing so much energy and so many resources in a project model, and also for arranging courses in project methodology for the employees.

From the applicants that were not accepted to the trainee program, a group of roughly 40 people were selected to take a project management course. These were people who were considered to have “potential,” according to the head of development (Interview, 2014), or “a reward for those not chosen [for the trainee program]” as the development strategist put it (Interview, 2013). Several project courses directed at civil servants—as well as politicians—have been organized since then. A consulting firm (the same one involved in the trainee program), has been responsible for most of these courses, even though the development strategist has been responsible for some of them as well. The consultant responsible for the project management courses describes how the courses—much like the trainee program—were designed to take the day-to-day assignments that civil servants were involved in into account, and introduce a project perspective to them:

People in these [public] organizations are doing lots of work in the project form but they don't always label it as projects for some reason, but they are projects, and they [the organizations] benefit immensely from the project form. So, we bring that with us [into the project management courses], we take their day-to-day work and tweak it a little bit to fit it to the project format, and that also gives them some tools to help them understand how everything holds together (Interview, consultant, 2014).

The project management courses, as well as the trainee program, have left the municipality with quite a few staff who are highly skilled when it comes to project management: “there are even more project managers than there are projects” (Development strategist, 2013). There is, nevertheless, still demand for project courses in the organization, according to the development strategist and some departments have organized their own courses to satisfy part of this



demand (Interview, development strategist, 2015). However, the courses are not exclusively targeting civil servants at a lower hierarchical level:

We received such good response from the employees that they started to put pressure upward in the organization, on the department heads, asking them questions like how many resources do I have for this project? When exactly do you need it to be finished? Why? etc. and these are all good questions that the project format helps you to ask (ibid).

The development strategist and the head of development also arranged a course for the department heads “concerning the procurement of projects and the role of project owners” (Interviews, 2013; 2014), and even the politicians have received an introduction to project management and the project model. Thus, all organizational levels have been in some contact with project management ideals and methodology.

As illustrated in the quotation above, a more linear model of top-down implementation is not only demanded by managers, but also desired by “ordinary” civil servants. The ability to work according to a project logic is desired both from “above” and from “below.” However, while specific (manifest) projects often represent a break from the ordinary bureaucratic work, the use of a project model and the encouragements of project methodology appear to be directed at achieving organizational clarity, order and control—encouraging a bureaucratic logic. The conditions for introducing a project model into Eslöv as an organizational tool have also been rife, since such a large portion of the employees have attended courses in project management in recent years (Development strategist, 2015).

## A project model becoming an organizational policy

The project model is described as having a status like that of a policy for the entire organization. However, no formal decision has been taken (yet), although the issue has been up for discussion. The city manager argues that no decision is really needed, due to the already widespread use of the model in the organization.

The project model is described in a 23-page document called “Guidelines for projects.” On the first page, it is stated that the project model

is not exclusively a tool for clearly defined manifest projects: “It is always useful” (Guidelines, 2014: 5):

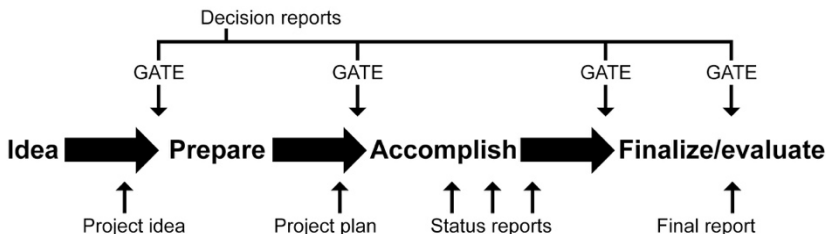
...the daily work should also have clearly defined objectives, a plan for the use of time and resources, be documented and, to some extent, be limited in time and scope (Guidelines, 2014: 4).

The model aims to guide both clearly defined project activities as well as ordinary work.

The model consists of four phases: idea, preparation, realization and evaluation. Each phase has document templates attached, prescribing what to be taken into consideration and what to achieve at each step: project proposal, project plan, status reports, final report, etc. There is also a “gatekeeper” at each step, or “gate”—a person with authority to make decisions about whether to continue with the project or not.

The consultant involved in the development of the model argues that it is to function as a guide to plan, structure and document work without letting these things take over: “Some of the classical project management tools or models includes 80 templates and 45 different checklists, and then it becomes too much documentation” (Interview, consultant, 2014). He continues to describe how they, in the case of Eslöv, wanted to find a balance in which the project model could guide the employees without exposing them to too much work: “the model that Eslöv bought from us is probably the smallest on the market” (ibid.).

**Fig. 3 Illustration of the project model**



The preparation phase, in which a project plan is produced, is given the most attention in the guidelines: “the preparation phase is the most important phase since all planning for the project is done here” (Guidelines, 2014: 6).

The reliance on planning as a means to reach organizational goals, or as a tool for correcting organizational errors, is a recurrent theme in my interviews in Eslöv. The city manager describes how implementation failures can be solved through better and more planning (Interview, 2014). The development strategist argues that “there is a need to invest more time in planning, to sit down from the beginning, and create a plan. What would we like to achieve?” (Interview, 2015). There is also pressure from departments within the municipality to work more according to plan and through the specific project model:

...if you compare the softer policy areas, especially education, where you can initiate a huge project without a visual plan, no target scenario and no procedures on how to go about it, with construction and real estate where you have plans stating exactly how things will turn out with a margin error of perhaps 3 mm, one becomes absolutely appalled. They know nothing about how to run a project in the soft sector (Interview with manager, Service Department, 2016).

The “harder” policy areas (infrastructure, buildings, traffic and IT) have a long tradition when it comes to organizing work in project form, and people responsible for the project model, including the city manager, have a background in these departments. Eslöv’s leading politician confirms that the technically-oriented departments of the organization have a long tradition of project work, but acknowledges the diffusion of the project format to other parts of the organization and embraces the clarity it brings:

They [the technical departments] work a lot with projects ... There is orderliness, they know exactly what to do and they have been to us [the City Council] and reported and it is a true joy listening to them... Our manager of the business department also runs a couple of projects according to the model, and she reports to us what she is doing... Through the work of the model, her work can be presented in an orderly fashion; it then becomes easy for her to communicate to us what she is doing and where she is in the plan (Interview with chairwoman of the City Council, 2015).

As we saw in chapter 6, the political logic and the project logic sometimes appear to go hand in hand, supporting or desiring the same thing. In chapter 6, it concerned the initiation phase of a project, in which innovation, decisiveness and the ability to take action was important—a situation in which both the political logic and the project logic were acted upon advantageously. In the quote above, it is somewhat different aspects of the project logic that are referred to—its ability to create order and clarity, which are features perhaps more traditionally associated with bureaucratic logic, but are here dedicated to the logic of the project. To organize in project form or to describe what you are doing in terms of a project may, as such, enhance your ability to communicate across organizational borders, and attract attention from managers and politicians.

A common language—between different departments and professionals or between civil servants and politicians—is regarded as a major benefit coming from the project model and project methodology:

...it has become easier to agree upon what to do and also easier to understand each other across borders. The benefit of our project model is that you have to think before you act, everyone is on-board and everyone speaks the same language (Interview, civil servant/project manager, 2014).

The development strategist responsible for the project model means that perhaps the most significant feature of the model is the common language. He exemplifies this with two specific concepts in the model: “impact objectives and “deliverables.” These concepts have been introduced to the politicians through the project management course mentioned above. He argues that politicians and civil servants ought to be using the same language regarding what should be done, by whom, for how much money and when (Interview, 2016). Due to the imperative of a common, project management-inspired language the budget procedures in all departments are now organized using phrases from the project model, such as impact objectives and deliverables to describe the work:

When we look at the political objectives and break them down to the departmental level, we do that by talking about impact objectives and deliverables... All departments break down the political objectives to their department or unit. So, everyone is using impact objectives and deliverables in their descriptions of their work. Then they all send it in so it can be part of the

common municipal budget. So, it is well established! (Interview, development strategist, 2016).

The development strategist, who argues for the use of impact objectives and deliverables in the organization, has been a student of the consultant responsible for the project model. He continuously emphasizes these phrases and argues that

when we are building a huge bridge, like Öresundsbron, we need 45 checklists and templates, but if we are to develop a handbook or some routines for administrators then we should, at best, be able to distinguish between impact objectives and deliverables and maybe have two decision points and be able to do a project plan, and everything else is unnecessary work (Interview, consultant, 2014).

By designing the project model to be as “slim” as possible, with fewer templates and checklists and some important phrases, there is a hope—on the part of the consultant as well as the development strategist—that the model will be more easily diffused in the organization and more widely used.

Besides the four phases, the guidelines also consist of information on how to handle subprojects, project budgets, how to conduct a stakeholder analysis, instructions for what it means to be a project manager, a project owner or part of a project team. There is also a specific section on communication:

...a project that nobody knows exist is in some sense a failed project ... [and] there is a great value, from a professional development perspective, to disseminate the project. We also have a responsibility toward the citizens to show how taxes are being used (Guidelines 2014:15).

It is important, it is argued, to communicate project activities—to make them visible—both within the organization, to other civil servants and politicians, but also to the citizens. Once again it becomes evident how the project logic is set out to follow or encourage a political logic of making actions taken and change and development efforts visible.

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the project model functions as an unofficial policy in the municipality. The head of development and the development strategist have pushed for a political decision regarding

the model. The idea has been to “ratify the project model as Eslöv’s model and to ensure that no one starts a project without it” (Interview with head of development, 2013). The city manager did not initially see the project model as a concern for the political leadership: “how we organize ourselves around this [how we implement political goals] is not a political issue to me” (Interview, 2014). However, considering that there turned out to be much debate around it, she thought that they might as well bring this to the politicians for a decision, much “in the same manner as we bring policies for systematic work environments for political decisions we might as well bring this, as a guideline for how we should work with projects” (ibid.). The head of development also argues that a political decision about the model would make encouraging people to work according to the model easier:

...the model could function as a tool of governance in relation to other departments. If we can refer to the model as an official policy, it also becomes a great tool of power! (Interview, head of development, 2013).

Even if there is no formal political decision, the interviewees<sup>26</sup> claim that this is hardly necessary due to the widespread use of the model. One of the department heads claims that “there is an unspoken agreement to use the model” in the organization (Interview, department head, 2016).

### **The project logic in ordinary operations and project fatigue**

The project model appears to be well known, at least in the central parts of the organization: among politicians, and civil servants at management level, as well as among civil servants working with cross-sector questions and/or organizational development.

However, there are also examples in which the model or a project methodology is used at a “lower” level of the organization. One civil servant describes how regular activities in her department are now often organized as if they were projects (Interview, civil servant, 2015). She gives an example from her own work as special education teacher and how her “projectified” way of working has spilled over to other special education teachers:

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<sup>26</sup> Development strategist, head of development, city manager.

...for instance, we do educational mappings [kartläggningar] and in doing these I wanted us four [educational teachers] to work similarly, so I took one of the templates [from the project model] ... and I asked [the person responsible for the project model] to help me out a little bit... and we now use that template to ensure that we work the same way.

The project model is used to ensure that a common work procedure is followed, and she refers to their common language and the use of “project lingo,” such as “impact objectives” and “deliverables,” as useful terminology within ordinary operations.

The City manager also describes the use of the project model and the importance of a common (project) language through an example from the department working with the exploitation of land for new buildings. This department, she argues, started to view their work from a project perspective—with the help of the project model—which caused them to re-formulate their function as a department and, in doing so, also change their practices and presentations of their work:

You can use the model when you want to bring order to a malfunctioning process, as in our exploitation department, for instance. They felt as if they didn't work optimally—are we really working optimally? If we were to view our work through the eyes of a project methodology, then perhaps we would work differently? And, so, they used that [the project model] as a way to find, or to clarify [their working process].... If we set up our work as if it were a project, then we wouldn't speak about exploitation, but perhaps about our target objective being 20 villas—we are going to have houses there, or new municipal residents! ... the project terminology was very useful for them (Interview, City manager, 2014).

In this example, the project model or a project methodology is applied to ordinary operations in order to gain new perspectives on the procedures. These new (project) perspectives changed how the department viewed, conducted and presented their work.

For yet another civil servant—an investigator at the department for children and youth—the project model “fits right into my way of working and the way I think. It's more a way for me to put words to the different parts of my work” (Interview, civil servant, 2014).

As a person who had been working for a long time in the organization and in various departments, I asked him to estimate the level of diffusion of the model in the organization. He said that it was difficult to estimate, but that it is widely used at a management level throughout the organization and in their department [for children and youth] it is “very established” in the management team. He continues to describe how:

...first-line managers, principals and preschool directors might not use the same lingo, but they have the same mind-set. In our system for monitoring and quality we force them into this kind of thinking, so even if you might not use the specific terminology from the project model, you still have that way of thinking. Then, regarding the staff, it is difficult to say how well it has spread to them, I think it differs somewhat, but it is definitely coming! (Interview, civil servant, 2014).

In their department, to work according to a project logic is described as a way to structure and create order and to control what is done.

The phrase “project methodology” is widely used by my interviewees when describing how ordinary activities are sometimes organized in terms of projects. According to the development strategist, this is done to battle project fatigue (Interview, 2015). She argued that some civil servants, managers and/or politicians do not like the idea of projects but if one talks about project methodology as a way to structure ordinary operations there is less criticism. A former development manager explains:

Those who oppose projects—meaning activities that are extracted from ordinary operations and made into projects, and then nothing happens—the projects end but never become part of ordinary operations; those who oppose that, if one instead talks in terms of project methodology and brings that methodology into the mandatory operations of the municipality, then you avoid the resistance (Interview, ex-development manager, 2014).

There is some resistance to project work in the municipality, and also some project fatigue, according to the development strategist and the former development manager. This resistance and fatigue appears to be aimed first and foremost at clearly defined, often externally-funded projects, described in chapter 5 as manifest projects. People respond critically to these projects that promise a lot when launched, but are perceived to amount to nothing. However,



when the project logic is acted upon as methodology in ordinary activities, there appears to be less critique and more praise of the clarity and order it may bring.

## The project model in action – management system

As described above, the project model appears to be rather well known and implemented throughout the entire organization, at least at the management level. However, how the model is used does differ. Some use it as a tool to initiate and carry out clearly defined projects, such as social investment projects or EU-funded projects. Other use the model as a tool to structure their ordinary operations, and some use the terminology coming from the model to further a common language. Yet some refer to the use of a project model in abstract ways in which the project is more of a “mind-set” and a way of thinking about one’s work.

Even though chapter 6 was in a sense a description of the project model in use, I will here show the model in action in one specific department. In chapter 6, I focused on describing processes of transformation in which ordinary operations were transformed into projects; here, on the other hand, I use the “project model in use” as a case to show how the organization builds its organizational and professional capacity to handle future work in accordance with a project logic.

At the Department for Health and Social Care—a department that roughly consists of 1,000 employees—the quality manager has been working with the development and implementation of a management system with the help of the project model in recent years:

The legislation<sup>27</sup> is very interested in process mapping. Processes shall be identified and within these, activities specified: If I decide that you should move into a nursing home, I should be able to demonstrate how I intend to ensure that process in the management system. There should also be risk assessments of what could happen and if something does happen how to handle that. It is

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<sup>27</sup> Regulations and general advice from the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare (SOSFS 2011:9).

quite extensive in its details and very inspired by ISO.<sup>28</sup> And in this work, we used the project model to systematize our work (Quality manager, December 11, 2013).

The quality manager was one of the people not chosen for the trainee program (described above) but selected to take a project management course. Before coming to Eslöv, he worked as an economist and controller in a large private company. According to him, he had a lot of project experience coming into the municipality. The management system was his working case throughout that project management course:

The purpose of the management system is to ensure that there are ongoing development projects at all 25-30 units. But also, to make the work transparent so that anyone who works can see and be inspired by ongoing projects. It is a way to increase communication between different units and at the same time it provides visibility and control (Quality manager, December 11, 2013).

When asked about how they worked before they had the management system and the project model, he replied that he had not really been able to figure that out:

It hasn't really been clear to me how they worked out in the different units. What is new, though, is that we put new words to what they do, we structure it, we upload it so it becomes accessible to everyone and we schedule or systematize the follow-up (Quality manager, December 11, 2013).

The activities and practicalities that the management system is supposed to manage is an organization of roughly 30 different units. All of those have a unit head and about 30-50 employees. Among the employees, team leaders have been appointed to function as “ambassadors in the organization, working with quality for the users—the citizens” (Quality manager, June 11, 2014). The team leaders were all given a project management course, a course that the quality manager himself was responsible for. In the same manner as the trainee program and the other project management courses given by the consultant, the

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<sup>28</sup> ISO is the International Organization for Standardization, an organization developing and publishing International Standards ([www.iso.org](http://www.iso.org), 2016).

team leaders were supposed to develop and implement a project during the course.

In the middle of 2014, about 30 projects were up and running and documented in the management system, according to the quality manager. Just to give an example, one of the units—working with people with disabilities—had three projects: one project directed at making it easier for individuals with disabilities to switch between different groups when/if needed; another project to enhance the use of their senses; and a third concerning one-on-one time for the individuals with staff members (Quality manager, 2014). So, these were smaller rather practically oriented projects designed to solve specific problems encountered in the course of ordinary work activities.

One other aspect of the system, the quality manager said, was the coordination between different organizational units. One manager may be responsible for three or four different units, and if she/he identifies the need, the same project can be carried out in all units.

The quality manager also argues for the importance of propagating all these projects, and even before there were any projects, a special day was designated to “disseminate all the projects that have occurred at different places in the organization, and to make it sort of kick-off for next year's round of projects” (Quality manager, December 2013). He concluded one of our discussions with the conviction that “with a project mind-set, throughout the organization we become more prone to carry out ideas without seeking external funds (*ibid.*).

The project logic is in this case acted upon to stimulate creativity and innovation in the organization, but also to make the initiatives that are taken visible. In that respect, the project logic corresponds to the organization's political logic. However, this is also an example of the seemingly contradictory nature of the project logic, in which the project logic is used to create order, structure and clarity in the organization and as a way to standardize certain procedures. The project logic also corresponds with, or enhances, some aspects of the bureaucratic logic.

## Project models – a national overview

As described above, the project model in Eslöv has served several purposes. Even though it is called a “project” model, and in many cases is used to guide

the organization and management of clearly defined projects, it has also been used as a source of reference and a common language—as a guiding tool to plan, structure and document the ordinary day-to-day work of civil servants, and as a way to present and communicate organizational practices. However, is this an Eslöv phenomenon, or do other municipalities use a project model as well? If so, how do they use it? To answer these questions, I scanned 30 municipalities' webpages for information on the subject (see chapter 4 for detailed descriptions).

The project models in the overview are strikingly similar. Much as in Eslöv, they all describe important phases of a project, and significant steps at which decisions are to be taken and documented. The models describe a rational sequence of events—initiation, establishment, implementation and closure (or similar)—with document templates attached. There are some differences regarding how many steps there are in a project, and how many templates or checkpoints there are in each model, but overall, they present comparable ideas of what forms a project.

When presenting their models, it is common to refer to other municipalities as sources of inspiration. Mariestad, for instance, has implemented “Kungsbacka's” model because it was thought of as “well thought out, clear and inspiring” (Mariestad, projektmodel, 2013) and Värnamo referred to Gislaved and Gnosjö as sources of inspiration (Värnamo, projektmodel, 2015).

Several of the models define what a project is, and these definitions are also very much the same in the different models:

- Projects have clearly defined targets
- Projects are limited in time and scope
- Projects are activities with specific resources attached
- Projects have someone receiving the project's results
- Projects are a temporary organization
- Projects are supposed to bring about change
- Projects can be cancelled

The definitions do not differ, even if the project model is designated for specific departments in the municipality and for different policy fields. Of the 30 project models, 19 were directed at aid projects throughout the municipality, whereas the models in 11 of the cases were focused on specific departments. In two of those cases, the models were intended to aid projects in one particular

department (IT and the exploitation of land) and in the other nine, there were several departments that were stated to be users of the models.

The most frequently described intent behind the project models was to guide people involved in projects, clarify roles, facilitate a common language, and support standardization.

In my survey, I found that 13 out of 30 municipalities described their project model as having been developed in close relationship with a consultancy firm. In several cases, the same consultancy firm was used: Malmö, Lund, Danderyd and Laholm, for instance, used the same model/consultant. The relationships between the consultants and the municipalities appeared to be similar in all cases. The consultant started with a generic model, but developed it according to the specific needs of the municipality. The consultant then continuously trained new staff in project management, and introduced them to the project model.

In almost all cases, project management training or project management courses are mentioned as necessary resources somehow connected to the models—some of them via consultants, and others via in-house courses. In one case, I even found a specific project management office supporting the entire organization in terms of the model, but also in terms of project ideas, finding project partners or help steering the project, or finding funding for it.

Some municipalities were rather vague on the possible use of their models—“as a model for the entire organization” (Kungälv, 2015) or “the organization has great need of support in the form of well-functioning processes, methodological support and tools” (Mölndal, 2012). I found no other organization that was as explicit about the use of the model in “ordinary” activities as Eslöv. However, as indicated by their definitions of what a project is, most of the municipalities regarded a project to be something that aims to “bring about change” in the ordinary organization. So, there is a proximity, at least in theory, between projects and the ordinary organizations, and also, as indicated above, that proximity is to be supported by training staff in project management and project model techniques.

## Agents promoting the use of projects

Thus far, I have described how Eslöv—as well as other local governments—mobilizes to handle future project activities in different ways. In Eslöv,

management: designed a trainee program to find future leaders by introducing project methodology; organized several project management and project methodology courses; developed a policy on how to organize externally-funded project; developed a project model; diffused that model throughout the organization; and encouraged the use of it in all kinds of activities. However, there are also important outside agents promoting this development: consultants, funding agencies and project-funding systems, and public regional organizations working with the sole purpose of promoting project-funding possibilities in local governments. I have already mentioned consultants several times as agents promoting the project logic in different ways, and project-funding agencies and project-funding systems as facilitators of project organizations. However, I also found various regional public organizations focused on supporting the use of projects and enhancing project know-how in local governments via EU funding. These regional actors are good cases to illustrate the strength of the project logic, since they not only match local problems to EU funding possibilities, but also work to translate officially expressed local government needs to fit EU funding requirements.

At the end of chapter 5, I described how the Skåne Association of Local Authorities (KFSK), along with several other regional actors, conducted *European Project Analysis* (EPA) in municipalities in Skåne. In Eslöv, the EPA resulted in the employment of an EU coordinator, as well as several EU-funded projects. However, in Eslöv's pursuit of more EU funding and more EU projects, I found in their EPA not only suggestions of specific EU projects, but also re-framing of Eslöv's expressed needs to fit the requirements of specific EU funds.<sup>29</sup>

The first step in conducting an EPA is a rough analysis in which key municipal documents, such as budgets, visionary and development plans, are analyzed with the purpose of "pointing out relevant programs for possible funding related to the municipality's short-term, as well as long-term, goals" (Eslöv EPA1, 2015: 3). The second stage in the EPA process is a detailed analysis in which actual projects are proposed for the municipality.

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<sup>29</sup> These re-framing processes are further described in terms of "re-compartmentalization" in an article co-written with Dalia Mukhtar-Landgren. There we describe re-compartmentalization as entailing a dual process whereby local government issues, through EPA analysis, not only are re-framed in processes of translation—they are also moved to new parts of the municipal organization and dealt with via temporary projects instead of ordinary, permanent operations. (Mukhtar-Landgren & Fred, forthcoming).

In the rough analysis for Eslöv, the KFSK proposes a couple of themes closely related to several of the EU funds:

The material [Eslöv's budget and visionary documents] contained some thorough and frequent themes in the municipal organization. One such theme could be summarized under the heading social sustainability. It regards the development and the increase in quality of education and care. [Eslöv] also has the ambition to create better conditions in the labor market for groups that are, or at risk of being, excluded: young people, the elderly and immigrants. The municipality wants to be a model for integration. Diversity, equality, equal treatment, values and attitude are important elements in this context. Based on this reflection, the KFSK recommends [Eslöv] to investigate the possibility of establishing a city-wide competence/quality development project funded by the European Social Fund, focusing on all relevant groups of staff (Eslöv EPA1, 2015: 11).

In addition to social sustainability—a quite general theme that extends throughout the entire municipal organization—the KFSK also proposes “environment and climate sustainability” and “participation and democracy” as themes. From the rough analysis, Eslöv was asked, by the KFSK, to prioritize and specify issues in order to secure EU funding. Following the prioritization made by the city council in Eslöv, the detailed analysis, then, “aims to present projects, and development opportunities” (Eslöv, EPA2, 2016:1). These opportunities are presented in the EPA analysis as a “smörgåsbord” from which Eslöv can choose as it pleases.

As an example, one of Eslöv's priorities were “integration.” In the detailed analysis, Eslöv was given a wide set of funding possibilities to deal with issues related to integration. First, it is stated that integration is an important part of the aims and goals of EU 2020. Then, the ESF is proposed as a possible source of funding. The ESF has three different programs, each of which represent different project possibilities for Eslöv. If the first program were to be chosen—skills supply—then a project related to staff working with issues connected with migration and integration was proposed. If, on the other hand, Eslöv wanted to work on methods designed to help individuals who, for different reasons, were perceived to be distanced from the labor market, then the second ESF program—increasing the transition to work—was proposed. If Eslöv were to focus specifically on methods intended to help young adults, the

third ESF program was thought to be suitable: the youth employment initiative. Yet another proposal from the KFSK was to frame integration in terms of rural development:

Depending on how you choose to work with migration and integration issues, there is also the LLU/Leader method within the rural program that can be useful in projects aiming to develop rural areas... (p. 3).

In addition to framing integration as an issue related to the skills of the municipal staff, unemployment, or rural development, it was proposed that Eslöv consider:

- *The European Regional Fund* (EURF) and their program for small- and medium-sized enterprises.
- One of the many *Interreg programs* (European territorial cooperation), in which international cooperation is mandatory.
- *The Programme for Employment and Social Innovation* (EaSI), an instrument promoting “a high level of quality and sustainable employment, guaranteeing adequate and decent social protection, combating social exclusion and poverty and improving working conditions”.<sup>30</sup>
- Or *Erasmus+*, which funds projects aiming to “provide foreign exchange options for students from within the European Union”.<sup>31</sup>

No thorough analysis of integration in Eslöv was conducted in the EPA nor was any detailed description of how the “problem” of integration manifests itself in Eslöv. That was not the purpose of the EPA. On the contrary, a more general understanding of integration (or public health, sustainable urban development, etc.) seemed to increase the potential project opportunities.

Each priority designated by Eslöv—including Eslöv as an attractive employer, sustainable urban development, environment and public health, digitalization, and equality—was treated like the integration case above, and a wide range of funding opportunities was provided.

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<sup>30</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1081&clangId=en>

<sup>31</sup> [http://www.erasmusprogramme.com/the\\_erasmus.php](http://www.erasmusprogramme.com/the_erasmus.php)



To receive funding, the issues of integration in Eslöv had to be framed as closely related to one of the funds proposed. Hence, integration is either a problem to be solved by: enhancing the skills of employees in Eslöv; the development of methods for people distanced from the labor market; a project supporting small- and medium-sized enterprises; an international collaboration project; or a student exchange program. The “solution” to any problem was dependent upon how it was defined and each definition had a possible project fund associated with it—EU funding is always available, you just have to define your problems “correctly” to receive it.

## Summary

Project work can mean different things. In Eslöv we found projects adding activities and resources to ordinary operations (chapter 5), as well as ordinary activities transforming to be handled via projects, which requires adaptation on the part of the rest of the organization (chapter 6). However, surrounding all these project practices are also activities encouraging further project activities. In this chapter I have investigated some of these project-supporting activities and actors, such as project management and project methodology courses, project policies, project models, consultants and regional network organizations, and how they facilitate the growing importance of project know-how.

In contrast to many of the projects described in chapters 5 and 6, the practices described here imply ideals of clarity, order and control rather than innovation or a break from traditional bureaucratic procedures. In Eslöv, a great deal of influence related to project management and project methodology comes from the “harder” policy areas of the municipality—from departments working with infrastructure, IT and technical services. The practices of these departments appear suitable for what I, in chapter 2, described as “projects as form,” characterized by the importance of planning, the focus on output, and clearly pre-defined objectives. However, “softer” policy areas such as health, social care, work and livelihood have also increasingly been subjected to project organization over the years. Projects in these “softer” departments are often described as devices for organizational transformation and change, and as such instead associated with what I in chapter 2 referred to as “projects as process.” With the introduction of the project model throughout the entire organization,

and especially in the “softer” parts of the organization such as social investment practices or health and social care as described above, the project-as-form perspective becomes imperative.

The project model in Eslöv, as well as in the 30 municipalities in my overview, bears distinct characteristics of project as a form, designed to deliver guidance for planning, consistency in working procedures, a common language, and clarity regarding the roles of civil servants, as well as managers and politicians. The practice is a combination of the project logic and bureaucratic logic in which specific features of “the project” are used to enhance the bureaucratic logic. While the (manifest) projects often represent a departure from the ordinary bureaucratic work, the use of a project model and the encouragements to use project methodology appear to be aimed at organizational clarity, order and control—thus strengthening the bureaucratic logic. Ironically then, the bureaucratic organization appears to combat bureaucracy with more bureaucracy.

In some of the municipalities in the survey, the project models were closely related to practices of specific, or manifest, projects, while in Eslöv there was an expressed desire to use the model in not just projects, but in all kinds of activities. As stated in the project model guidelines, “It is always useful,” and the organizational principles of a project were thought of as something that could help an entire organization to gain clarity and control.

Added to the development of an organization mobilizing project skills at the individual as well as the organizational level are the project management courses, which were delivered mainly by consultants. The consultants have a strong incentive to support project work in the municipalities as it continuously supplies them with work: first there is the development of a project model, and then the introduction of that model to the organization, followed by training programs for existing staff, and a continuous flow of new employees in need of training. Further mobilizing support are the regional network organizations explicitly working to increase the use of projects, as well as increasing the areas of application for projects in local government—if your definition of a problem is not eligible for funding, define your problem differently!

Even though I found Eslöv to be very much interested in projects and project activities throughout the organization, it must be noted that the bulk of my interviews and observations were carried out at a strategic level. However, at that level of the organization, the project logic was influential and, according to my interviewees, the project model was widely spread and used, at least at a

management level, throughout the entire organization. There was also an eagerness throughout the organization to continue the development of more projects and more reliance upon project methodology, and even more hierarchy.

I found few examples of resistance, but some project fatigue described at all levels of the organization. At the political level, as well as the strategic and the street-level, I found employees frustrated over projects not amounting to anything. The frustration was directed toward the kind of projects described in chapter 5, which were often externally funded. The frustrations were described as irritation over promises not kept by politicians and managers who did not endorse the continuation of the work, or by civil servants not delivering what was promised. Civil servants, as well as politicians, described how they saw the same, or similar, projects over and over again, or how dedicated employees invested a great deal of attention into a development project that later in the process got cancelled due to a lack of funding. However, I encountered no frustration regarding project methodology used in “ordinary” work, or how the project model, more or less, was to be applied anywhere at any time. So, when the project logic bears a resemblance to traditional bureaucracy, but perhaps wearing a different costume, it is more easily accepted. These are very much the characteristics of the Trojan horse as expressed in the introductory chapter.



## PART THREE

Projectification | The Trojan horse of local government

Part III, the final part of the thesis, is dedicated to discussions and conclusions. Here is where the empirical findings of chapter 5, 6 and 7 are discussed in relations to earlier research and to my theoretical framework of translation theory and institutional logics.

In chapter 8, I first discuss, in a summarizing manner, the three conceptualizations of local government projectification and how these are related to, and influence, each other. Following that are discussion of:

- social investment as a case of projectification and a local government Trojan horse;
- agents of projectification;
- the institutional logics at play in local government project practice;
- the common project language;
- projects as organizational routine;
- the resistance towards projects;
- and, finally, projects as low risk political as well as managerial endeavors.

The purpose of chapter 9 is to briefly describe what I aimed to do in this thesis, what I actually have done and what my main conclusions are. Building further on what has been done in this thesis, I also discuss some thoughts of what future public sector projectification research ought to do.

# How is local government projectification manifested in practice?

Contemporary Western societies rely to an increasing extent on project organizations. Different kind of industries and organizational fields, have been used as examples of areas crowded by temporary organizations. However, only rarely is public administration mentioned in this context, and local government has never been the specific subject of inquiry. There is also a bias in the literature toward a conceptualization of the phenomenon as a matter of—first and foremost—the sheer number of projects. In this thesis, I have broadened that perspective, and aimed to describe several different projectification processes and how they unfold in local government practices.

This chapter is a summary and analysis of the major findings from my study. Here, I discuss the empirical results in close relationship with earlier research and the theoretical framework of translation theory and institutional logics presented in chapters 2 and 3.

## Three conceptualizations of projectification

In Eslöv we found a great deal of experience in project work within the “harder” policy areas working with infrastructure, IT or technical services. Some of these departments were more or less completely project-based, and had been working with projects for a long time. The perceived idea of these departments’ project abilities to plan in detail, use a common language and show concrete results—what Sahlin (1996) calls *project as form*—appear to have been influential when the management in Eslöv advocated the use of projects and project methodology as solutions to various problems in the organization. However, within the “softer” policy areas working with health, social care, culture, and work and livelihood, we also found a growing interest in project-based work, and also a great deal of access to project funding. But these projects often referred to other desirable characteristics of “the project” that were more similar

to what Sahlin (ibid.) calls *project as process*. Even if the projectification process in Eslöv appears to have been influenced by the more technical departments' project work, there were also strong ideas of projects as a break with ordinary bureaucratic procedures, and as something innovative and collaborative.

When combining these different influences—detailed planning, order and clarity on the one hand, and organizational change and innovation on the other—the idea of a rather powerful and attractive organizational solution comes to mind. Projects are seen as combining this rational notion of controllability with the modern entrepreneurial focus on creativity and innovation. A project may represent the promise of a solution to clearly pre-defined objectives, a specified plan for how to reach them (including personnel, a timeline, and a budget); at the same time, it supposedly frees the organization from the shackles of bureaucracy, delivering innovation and organizational change. One may advocate or defend the use of projects with various, sometimes contradictory, arguments—project work results in control, efficiency and clarity, and/or projects allow us to think outside the box, be creative and organize in post-bureaucratic forms.

In this thesis, I have investigated how this powerful and attractive solution manifests itself in local government practices. In terms of projectification, my study confirms earlier research, but also enhances it both empirically and theoretically. Projectification, I argue, can be conceptualized as the increasing use of project organizations; this has been done before, although not in a local government context. However, projectification may also be conceptualized as the transformation and adaptation of ordinary procedures, as well as an increasing reliance upon the project logic and the capacity to handle project activities.

## **Proliferation**

In both the private and public-sector context, projectification is most often conceptualized as an increasing reliance on projects in the execution of organizational action (Lundin et al., 2015; Godenjem et al., 2015). In Eslöv, we found not just a lot of projects (defined as temporary organizations undertaking specific actions by a specific team for a specific amount of time), but also an eagerness to engage in more projects, both externally and internally funded. In chapter 5, I referred to this as proliferation, describing how clearly



defined projects and project ideas are organized to an increasing extent, but are also spread and diffused within and between local government organizations.

Few of the projects I studied in Eslöv were the result of Eslöv-specific problems. Rather, they were project ideas from other municipalities and organizations that were “brought” to Eslöv by civil servants and managers who “found” them via conferences or field trips. Project work lends itself readily to descriptions of what will be done, by whom, when and for how much, which extracts them from the “messiness” of ordinary work. In addition to making such work more visible, it also becomes more “transferable” between different locations and contexts. I described some of these projects as being financial as well as organizational “add-ons,” as they “gave” the municipality more funding, but also more activities. As a result of project ideas moving between organizations, I came across the same, or similar, projects in several municipalities at the same time when talking to representatives at conferences. Forssell et al. (2013) found similar phenomena to be true in their study of the city of Malmö.

The positive approach to this movement between organizations and municipalities is the learning possibilities it provides. The more critical approach, however, is that the projects appear to be the result of another project in another context rather than a response to locally identified problems. And when applying for funding, the local practices or problems have to be adapted to external, sometimes international, funding requirements (see Hodgson & Cicmil, 2007).

Translation theorists (Lindberg, 2014; Lavén, 2008:26; Latour, 2005; Czarniawska & Hernes, 2005;) would argue that projects are context-dependent: a specific project in one municipality may function and result in completely different effects in another. The projects and the project ideas must be translated, or adapted, to the prerequisites in terms of resources, knowledge, culture, institutional settings, etc. of the receiving party.

When the projects and the project ideas that were perceived as ready and available solutions were “moved,” I found that context was somewhat ignored or trivialized by the receiving party. In fact, the whole idea of *best practices*, as promoted by the EU<sup>32</sup> (and, in the case of social investment funds, the SKL) is based on the assumption that a best practice is transferable to all contexts, and

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<sup>32</sup> For example, see “Best practice portal” to “find out what works”:  
[http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/best-practice\\_en](http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/best-practice_en).

if a project is successful in one place, it will be successful in another. In that sense, one can regard “the project” as a solution looking for problems rather than the other way around, as in the famous garbage can model first formulated by Cohen, March and Olsen (1972; see also Kingdon, 2011). A social investment project or a social investment fund is a solution that local governments may apply to various problems at hand. The call for collaboration in the Swedish public sector is yet another example in which the solution, almost reflexively, has been projects (see Löfström, 2010; Montin, 2007; Danemark, 1999). In these cases, the problem has been described as a society of growing complexity and organizational fragmentation that is colored by a silo mentality, demanding inter-organizational collaboration. And the solution has often been projects—a solution also backed up by the resistance from the bureaucratic logic, keeping the uncertainty that may come from temporary, innovative collaborations at a distance from ordinary work.

### **Transformation and adaptation**

The growing number of clearly defined projects and their diffusion is just one conceptualization of local government projectification. Building further on Midler’s work on Renault, in which he described the transformation of a classical functional organization to that of “autonomous and powerful project teams” (Midler, 1995:36), I found similar transformative phenomena to be true in local government. In Eslöv, some ordinary operations were transformed into projects with the help of the ordinary budget or the internal project funding system. These projects did not just “add” activities to the organization, but transformed ordinary bureaucratic procedures to be handled as projects—the same, or similar, activities were conducted, but in temporary form. The activities were not unique, specific efforts that demanded a project, but rather continuous activities or even routines that were organized as projects as part of an overall strategic goal for the departments. This meant that mandatory services, to some extent, were organized in temporary form, and were continuously in competition with other possible project ideas and for funding. The transformation meant more projects, but at the same time, fewer ordinary operations.

Midler (1995) mentions how the transition to project teams at Renault resulted in needs for adaptation in the surrounding organization and its supply networks for the new projectified structures. Although I think that processes of

adaptation are among the most important characteristics of, and consequences coming from, projectification, at least in a public-sector context, Midler does not develop that argument further. When an organization “adds” a project to their activities, it must adapt somewhat to that project—some resources must be allocated, and if implementation is to happen, the organizations involved must adapt to handle the project results. However, when transforming ordinary activities, and not “just” adding something temporarily, the surrounding context must adapt not only to the specific project, but to the project logic in order to handle these transformations. In the case of social investment, we saw processes of transformation and adaptation in the areas of social services, sustainable social development and public health. All these activities were to be organized through a project funding system, including project calls and application procedures that meant continuous competition in terms of project ideas, as well as temporary funding possibilities instead of the allocation of funding through ordinary yearly budgets. It also meant adapting the ordinary procedures to specific criteria, such as collaboration, innovation, scientific evidence, and activities that were evaluable, in addition to content-related criteria for social investment.

The whole idea of a project funding system is a rather powerful governing tool directing the attention of local government staff and organizations toward a specific cause and/or policy area. When a project funding system is introduced into local government and a specific policy area, it not only transforms ordinary activities into temporary project activities, but also immediately specifies criteria for what is to be funded, and how it should be organized and assessed. In addition, it also brings funding competition to the forefront (the market logic). And this does not just apply to the social investment funds, but to all project funding systems, including the EU whose project funds to some extent dictate local government practices.

### **Organizational capacity building**

The processes of transformation and adaptation in the social investment case also meant the organization of a committee of executive managers responsible for the funding system and the projects, the initiation of steering groups for each project, and the training of civil servants in project management and project methodology.

Closely related to the processes of transformation and adaptation is the conceptualization of projectification as organizational capacity building. Transformation and adaptation to the project logic demands project-competent organizations and staff. Some of the efforts to build local government project capacity are carried out explicitly as an organizational strategy, such as the training of staff, the development of a project model or the implementation of specific project policies. There are also individual forces driving this development of project capacity building forward in terms of the actions of civil servants and managers, as well as consultants.

However, some project capacity building activities appears to “just happen,” or be rationalized as a response to earlier decisions. Eslöv wanted to implement a social investment fund as a response to what other municipalities did and the persuasive talk given by Ingvar Nilsson, and so they did. But in order to do so, they had to organize a project funding system, which required a project model, which led to the employment of more project managers and the need for further project management courses. A similar rationalization was found in Norrköping, as well as in Örebro; the difference here being, perhaps, that Örebro, although trying to ban the word project, focused even more on project management as a specific civil servant skill and capacity for the local government in the future.

A more implicit way to build the capacity to handle project activities and strengthen the reliance on a project logic is through language. In Eslöv, the project model functioned as a device diffusing the language of the project in the organization, and we found specific project-inspired vocabulary used when presenting day-to-day activities, and even in ordinary budget procedures.

## How the conceptualizations interrelate

The three conceptualizations of local government projectification are connected to each other, and one cannot exist without the other. There is no local government that practices project capacity building without organizing projects as well, just as there are no local governments organizing projects without building some sort of project capacity. In addition, there is no need to transform or adapt to the project logic without projects or the capacity to actually transform and/or adapt. However, there might be degrees to which the conceptualizations are manifested in practice, and each conceptualization can

also function as a guiding principle when identifying processes of projectification.

### **The building of organizational capacity within processes of project proliferation**

I argue that the most commonly recognized conceptualization of projectification is the reference to the increasing use of clearly defined and demarcated activities in time, scope and resources allocated. In the “harder” policy areas, these projects often result in something tangible like a building, an IT service, or cleaner streets, for instance, while the projects within the “softer” policy areas are to result in organizational change of some sort. Such projects are “distant” from the organization’s ordinary activities. By distant, I mean that the projects are organized as something other than the ordinary activities: with a specific budget—often with outside funding—employees on temporary contracts, and sometimes even a specific geographical site or locale where the project takes place.

As discussed in chapter 5, this distance makes the projects difficult to implement, meaning that there are perceived problems in learning from these projects. However, despite the distance from ordinary operations and/or implementation failure, there are consequences in terms of projectification beyond the specific projects. One way to conceptualize these consequences are as organizational capacity building.

The organization’s project capacity in these cases is restricted to specific civil servants and managers becoming better and better at allocating funding and at persuading the organizations involved to allow their projects to continue. These are the civil servants finding project ideas and helping them travel between municipalities and between funding agencies. In Eslöv, we found an organization striving to increase the use of these kinds of projects and the use of external funding, as manifested in their policy on externally funded projects. There was an eagerness to build further on the capacity to handle future project activities in the organization.

### **The building of organizational capacity within processes of transformation and adaptation**

The reliance on the project logic and the building of project capacity was perhaps most evident in the processes of adaptation and transformation described in chapter 6. In these processes, there was a great need for project management capacity at several levels of the organization, but also a need for project capacity to be built into the organizational structures and routines in order to handle project activities. In Eslöv (as well as in Norrköping and Örebro), we saw the welfare committee organized as a permanent structure to support the project funding system. We saw the project model diffused into the whole organization and promoted as a model to be used in all kinds of activities. We also saw their policy on externally-funded projects and discussions regarding the project model becoming a policy. The project logic is not tied only to the projects per se, but also to the preconditions to, and consequences of, the projects.

In the processes of proliferation, the project logic and the bureaucratic logic were distant from one another. In processes of transformation and adaptation, bureaucratic logic is literally unavoidable. Local government social investment funds can be viewed as a compromise between several logics. In Eslöv, the initiation of the social investment budget was an idea carried forward by politicians, and a decision taken by politicians using a political logic of decisiveness and an urge to take action. However, to become a practice, the social investment perspective was translated and adapted to the local government bureaucratic order, and organized within the ordinary hierarchy and governed by the ordinary budget.

The perceived break from bureaucratic logic, as promised by the social investment perspective, was partly upheld using the project logic as well as market logic. The social investment budget was organized within the ordinary bureaucratic, hierarchical structures, but financed only innovative and collaborative projects that were reviewed in competition with other project proposals. In order to receive funding related to social investment, the organizations had to transform their practices into projects. However, each project related employee was also asked not only to undertake a project management course, but also to use their project model when planning, conducting and evaluating the projects.

The reliance on project management and project methodology is not just evident in the practices of social investment projects. In Malmö, all new

employees at the city office are required to take project management courses and be introduced to their project model. In Denmark, Löfgren and Poulsen (2013) showed how the demand for project know-how increased dramatically when hiring public servants during 1982-2011, and was perceived at the end of 2010 as a natural element in organizing governmental work. So, the skills of a project manager and some kind of project know-how appear to be important and sought- after in local government employees.

## Agents of projectification

Eslöv is an organization engaged in a great deal of project-related work and activities, and an organization that at several levels expresses an interest in engaging in more projects. The support and advocacy for the project logic comes from agents within the municipal organizations, as well as from its surrounding context. The different agents are relevant because they interpret and reinterpret the different logics while performing practices. This provides them with the autonomy to influence how the logics are translated into practice, which also puts them in a position of power.

### Supporting the project logic in the local government context

Perhaps the most obvious source of support for the project logic in the surroundings of local government are the many project-funding agencies and project-funding systems facilitating organizations with funding opportunities. In chapter 6, I gave some examples of the vast amount of funding agencies located within the broadly defined area of social investment. Within that field—or what I referred to as an institutional infrastructure—we also found a wide range of conferences, reports, networks and seminars associated with national authorities and municipal front runners that implicitly or explicitly advocated the project logic. Wenger and Snyder (2000) describe a similar phenomenon, calling it a community of practices, in which “groups of people [are] informally bound together by shared expertise and passion for a joined enterprise” (p. 139). However, in my case, social investment is the shared expertise and passion that explicitly bound people and groups together, while the project logic more implicitly—like a Trojan horse—binds them together as well.

The EU is another example of a relevant agent and structure for local government project work due to—among other things—their many different project funds. However, EU funding is complex, and in response to this complexity, several municipalities turn to various “EU-expert organizations” specialized in matching the perceived needs of local government with specific EU funds. Mukhtar-Landgren and Fred (forthcoming) describe how these actors—regional network organizations and consultancies—not only re-frame the expressed needs of local governments to secure funding (for example, education issues are re-framed as matters of “skills development,” “employability” or “social exclusion”), they also move issues around between policy areas and to new parts of the municipal organization so that they can be dealt with as temporary projects rather than ordinary (permanent) operations.

Although not given a great deal of attention in the research on public sector projectification, consultants play an important role in advocating the project logic, as in the example above. In Eslöv, a close relationship with a consultancy firm resulted in a trainee program, a project model, and the continuous building of project capacity through training of staff. One of the managers in Eslöv was also headhunted from a consultancy firm working with organizational leadership.

More subtle support of the project logic comes from consultants promoting specific “solutions” such as social investments and social investment funds. As mentioned several times, one particular consultant—Ingvar Nilsson—played an important role in the implementation of social investment funds in Sweden. Even though he describes himself as despising projects (Conference field notes, 2015), the most practical outlet that he promotes in local government has been project funding systems and project organizations.

### **Supporting the project logic at the political level**

At the political level, the project-related work in Eslöv was regarded as something providing orderliness and clarity, and improving the relationships between the civil servants and the politicians. There was a strong connection between the political level and the more traditional perspective of “projects as form.” However, I also found a strong relationship between political logic and “projects as process,” emphasizing the innovative and collaborative aspects of the project logic. This was most evident in the initial phases of the projects. At that point in time, the focus was on showing decisiveness and the ability to take



action; the most important thing appeared to be to initiate projects, not to finalize them! The project and political logics appeared to support the same thing. As expressed by Sahlin (1996), a well-designed and well-formulated project that expresses an appealing vision of the future is likely to result in great support, especially *before* the project launches. For politicians or political-administrative leaders, the ability to take action may be imperative, but it also appear to be rather risk-free. In a large national survey in Denmark, Olsen (2017) shows how the citizens evaluated political and political-administrative action “more positively than inactions—regardless of the outcome” (p. 1352). A launched project is in that respect better than no project, regardless of what it might amount to in the end.

### **Supporting the project logic at the management level**

The managerial level in Eslöv supports the project logic through a trainee program, several project management courses targeting street-level civil servants as well as managers and politicians, and through the development of a project model used—and diffused—as an organizational tool to guide project work and implement a project funding system. In Eslöv, we found several managers with a background in the more technical departments advocating a specific type of project and project methodology, and we also found one of them to have a background at one of the consultancy firms that had been working with Eslöv for quite some time. So, there are rather strong influences from the traditional or more technical characteristics of the project logic. However, the innovative and collaborative features were also present in the training programs, course, and the project funding systems: they all aimed to transform the bureaucracy through the use of projects and/or project methodology.

In terms of levels—stuck as it is between the political leadership and the street-level practice of projects—the management level perhaps has the most to gain from the dualistic nature of the project logic. Managers or department heads advocating for the increased use of projects and project methodology in ordinary work can talk about, describe and present project work, but emphasize different aspects of the project logic depending on their target group. In Eslöv, we found that the argument used by managers to make the project model a policy for the entire organization was based on the idea that it would bring order and clarity to the organization. At the same time, the same managers argued for the use of the same model in social investment practices in order to find,

test and implement innovative and collaborative ideas to change and transform parts of the bureaucratic procedures. In Eslöv (as well as in Örebro), we found several managers well-equipped to use or act upon the project logic—at the political level as well as the civil servant level—and aid in the diffusion of the project logic in the organization. As a result, while project logic is of growing importance, people skilled in using project logic, and people able to translate other logics into project mode, are sought-after (see Löfgren & Poulsen, 2013).

### **Supporting the project logic at the civil servant level**

From a civil servant perspective, the support of the project logic came in the form of civil servants explicitly wanting to (or finding themselves in a situation in which they had to), engage in activities that were somewhat different compared to ordinary operations. Some civil servants were given the opportunity to act as project managers or be part of a project team on already existing and funded initiatives, while others found project funding of their own and organized projects with specific objectives. There appeared to be rather great autonomy for civil servants in terms of the initiation of projects—if one is able to find funding, the project is a go! In an audit on the use of EU funding in Eslöv, the consultant responsible argued that all EU projects were initiated and run by dedicated civil servants.

More implicitly supporting the project logic was the employment of new staff as temporary project members. For some of these, project employment was their first step into the labor market. For others, project employment meant a continuation of previous temporary employment. One of the civil servants/project members described how she was given the chance, and was encouraged, to find new funding to prolong the projects she was involved in, therefore prolonging her employment. If she received funding, the department continued the work she was involved in, and extended her employment; if she did not, the project ended—as did her employment—and the department continued to function as before.

At the level of civil servants, the project as something innovative and transformative was more evident than that of a project as a device for control or clarity. For the individual civil servant, it was either a way into the labor market, a way to prolong their employment or a break away from years of continuous work. However, there were also several examples of single civil servants working

with project methodology not as an innovative and transformative device, but so as to create order, clarity and consistency in ordinary working procedures.

The increasing reliance on the project logic as a result of the support presented above indicates some kind of institutional transformation, but a transformation that is somewhat illusive. Powell and Rerup (2017) argue that institutional transformation often is subtle, “not particular abrupt, and apparent only after a considerable period of time” (p. 1). Rather than embracing perspectives that highlight heroic change agents or exogenous events and shocks, they stress “that most micro activities are fairly mundane, aimed at sense-making, alignment, and muddling through” (ibid.). What is indicated in this thesis are tendencies of projectification that are manifested in micro activities or practice, but hooked into, shaped by, and constituent of the institutional logics at play. My focus on the practices of civil servants comes from a conviction (as observed by James March, 2008) that “history is not produced by the dramatic actions and postures of leaders, but by complex combinations of large number of small actions by unimportant people.” Although I would not call the civil servants in Eslöv and their practices unimportant, I do argue that they are part of a development much larger than specific and demarcated social investment projects. Their active engagement in the application of the project logic in combination with a project-supporting leadership and a broader institutional complex facilitating the project logic is driving processes of local government projectification forward.

## Social investments as a Trojan horse

Zooming out from Eslöv and using social investment as a case, I found support of the project logic in the form of great access to project funding, a variety of networks, conferences, field trips, consultants, and publications. In most of these cases, projects were alluded to as something “beyond” bureaucracy, something allowing innovation and inter-organizational collaboration and rarely as devices delivering control, clarity and standardized ways of working.

The support of the project logic in these cases were also often highly implicit. Social investment actions were at the forefront of the networks, conferences and field trips, and the projects had more the function of vehicles transporting social investment objectives. However, the translation of the social investment perspective to local government practices has, with no exceptions,

resulted in project-funding systems and project organizations. This translation has also required the mobilization of project management skills, as well as some adaptation of local government organizations to handle application procedures, and project organizations initiating and finalizing.

In Eslöv, as well as in other municipalities, I found social investment projects to be regarded by the people involved as a means to an end. My findings and my arguments, however, suggest that they ought to be viewed as “instruments” producing specific effects of their own, regardless of their stated objectives (see Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2007:3). Regardless of the results or the effects in terms of social investment in local government organizations, there are and will be “latent consequences” from the initiatives due to the fact that they support the project logic. In Eslöv, these consequences came in the form of an increasing use of their project model, the growing importance of project management skills and transformations of parts of their organization to handle work related to sustainable social development and public health via a project funding system. Following the argument put forward in chapter 7, the involvement in social investment activities created the need to build project-related capacity in the organizations.

Using the much larger empirical case of the EU, it is possible to take the ideas of latent consequences and the support of the project logic as a Trojan horse even further. Research on EU-funded projects claims to find little or no effects on the stated objectives from years of programs and projects (Bulin & Svensson, 2011; Jensen & Trägårdh, 2012; Svensson et al., 2009; Jakobsson et al., 2012; Tillväxtverket 2011a, 2011b, 2011c). Much like in the case of social investment, my argument here is that there are effects coming from these initiatives but not always the expected, “manifest” effects. When an organization launches a social investment project intended to engage fourth graders in sporting activities, or an EU-funded project designed to battle unemployment, the organizations (and the funding parties) expect, or hope for, effects on the employment rates and the physical activities of fourth graders. However, consequences coming from the application of the project logic are rarely explicitly stated as objectives, calculated for, or even recognized. These are the latent consequences, operating under the radar as Trojan horses.

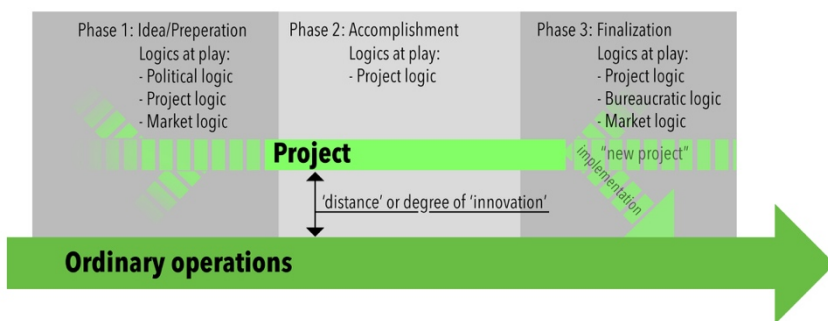
Stating the exact effects of Trojan horses is somewhat difficult, and beyond the aim of this thesis, but we may discuss possible consequences since we know the characteristics of the project logic—what it may bring to local government. Following a project logic:

- Local government practices (individual civil servants as well as organizational units or entire municipalities) may begin to compete for resources more than before.
- Temporary employment might become more frequent.
- The focus of political as well as managerial attention might fluctuate more readily, depending on the initiation of projects.
- Certain activities might be more readily terminated as projects than if they were part of the ordinary procedures.

## Institutional logics at play during the life cycle of a project

In the traditional literature on projects, as well as in the local government project models described in chapter 7, one often come across the notion of a project life cycle—a description of different phases of a project’s life.

**Fig. 4 Logics at play**



In the project model in Eslöv, there were four proposed phases: idea, prepare, accomplish and finalization and evaluation. In different models the phases are called different things (and some include five or six phases) but they all indicate a beginning, middle and end phase of a project. During these phases, different institutional logics are at play.

During the initial phases of a project, the political logic appears to be of great importance, showing decisiveness and the ability to take and demonstrate action. As already described, the political and project logics appear to support the same thing, and parts of that have to do with the conceptualization of time, which in project management and politics is similar. Launching a new, fresh project is always more interesting than evaluating old ones, since politics (like project management) is future-oriented.

The market logic is also apparent in the beginning. Both through the “marketplace” of available funding possibilities, and also through available project ideas marketed and presented via local government web pages, conferences or field trips as ready-to-use solutions to various problems. Within each project funding system, represented by funding agencies such as the EU, Finsam, SIDA or the local government social investment funds, market logic also makes its appearance by encouraging competition between project ideas in which (only) the “winners” are rewarded project funding.

During the projects, the political logic appears to be less needed or important, and the activities are left to the practices of project management through technocratic planning, execution and reporting tools. But, as we saw in Eslöv, the civil servants and managers could also, during the project, allude to the project logic in their presentations to the political level to maintain the interest of the politicians. The visible nature of the project logic is attractive to the politicians, as is the clarity and order it brings. The projects are initiated with the use of political logic emphasizing innovation, organizational change and a break from ordinary procedures, but accomplished through ideals of projects as devices for clarity, order and control.

The political logic, the market logic and the project logic were all important in the initial phases of the projects, but the bureaucratic logic was notable by its absence, even though the kind of projects we are discussing here often aim to transform or change something within the ordinary, bureaucratic organization (Brulin & Svensson, 2011; Sjöblom, 2006; Sahlin-Andersson, 2002). However, the bureaucratic logic was used to keep the projects at a distance in order to avoid change, innovation and uncertainty. Or to put it a different way, the project logic, the market logic and the political logic help to keep the bureaucratic logic at a distance to permit uncertainty and innovation. Jensen et al. (2017) argue that the further the distance between the projects and the ordinary operations, the more innovative and different compared to the ordinary operations the projects are allowed to be. Adding to that, I would argue

that the “closer” to the ordinary operations, the more closely-related to bureaucratic logic the project must be. The “distance” makes the project problematic as a subject for implementation. Then, the bureaucratic logic becomes evident, as resistance, and the temporary character of the projects function like protection against organizational change—organizational innovations are suitable for temporary projects, not the bureaucracy.

Due to a combination of the bureaucratic logic resisting operations running “counter to its ordinary procedures” and the existence of a marketplace of available funding, project practice in Eslöv was often to encourage finding new funding, prolonging the activities as projects instead of persuading the organizations to implement project results. As a result, the project logic and the bureaucratic logic also adapted to each other. The “temporary” projects became “new” projects, almost like a bureaucratic routine. The entrepreneurial civil servant work is then not so much about innovative project ideas as it is about finding new funding (in the project funding marketplace) to prolong the activities and/or employment.

This phenomenon of prolonging projects or initiating “new” similar projects with the same staff and similar target groups is not unique to Eslöv, but found in other municipalities and in other public-sector organizations as well (see Forssell et al., 2013; Sahlin-Andersson, 1996; Sahlin, 1996; 1991).

## Projectification as bureaucratization?

Even though the project form often is perceived as more flexible than that of the bureaucracy, the practical outcome seldom represents a radical break with traditional, bureaucratic, management models. Rather, it appears to aid a rediscovery and reuse of central bureaucratic practices and procedures such as reporting, documentation and standardization. The project form is not a break with, but a reinvention of, hierarchy and bureaucracy. As described by Diefenbach and Todnem By (2012), despite “change management rhetoric,” team work and projects: “hierarchical order and control continues to rule the organization” (p. 8).

The project model in Eslöv, as well as in the 30 municipalities in the overview presented in chapter 7, are all intended to deliver guidance for planning, consistency in working procedures, a common language, and clarity regarding the roles of civil servants, as well as managers and politicians. Practices

generated by the use of the project model in Eslöv can be described as a combination of the project and bureaucratic logics, in which specific features of “the project” were used to enhance the bureaucratic logic. While the social investment projects were initiated using a political logic, representing a departure from ordinary bureaucratic procedures, the use of the project model and the encouragements of project methodology are aimed more at organizational clarity, order and control—thus strengthening the bureaucratic logic—rather than emphasizing innovation and organizational change. Ironically then, the bureaucratic organization battles bureaucracy with more bureaucracy.

Even when trying to work according to the imperatives of innovation, collaboration and organizational change, Eslöv took on the project logic but did so to produce more clarity, order and control. “We are heading toward more hierarchy” as one manager pointed out. He continued to argue that managers and civil servants “want more hierarchy, but at the same time have influence on working procedures and the capacity to do something, and I think that the particular structure from the project has exactly that”. More hierarchy is welcomed and even sought after by civil servants, as well as politicians.

The critique against the increasing use of projects, and the project society as contributing to organizational structures dissolving in favor of more temporary, flexible, organizations with fluid boundaries (see Löfström, 2010; Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005; Powell, 2001) appears to neglect at least parts of the actual practices. The intentions may be innovation, change and organizational transformation, but there are also rather evident examples of project practices encouraging the bureaucratic logic, although in the name of “the project.”

Perhaps one can talk about two separate, and maybe even competitive, bureaucracies: One, more traditional bureaucracy manifested in practice by hierarchy, rule enforcement, a silo mentality, permanence and a cyclical perception of time in which phenomena are recurring time and time again; and a second project bureaucracy, in which project management techniques of rationality and planning are used to bring order and clarity to organizations through a linear perception of time in which phenomena are planned, executed and then terminated. Despite the intention to innovate and transform, bureaucracy reinvents itself as a project bureaucracy in parallel with the “traditional” bureaucracy. In the case of social investment, there is a greater narration of innovation, transformation and a break with bureaucratic



procedures, although manifested in practice through the project logic as yet another, perhaps more sophisticated, bureaucracy.

Peters (2003) argues that “contemporary public administrators find it difficult to give voice to values of Weberian public bureaucracy without appearing to be anachronistic” (in Byrkjeflot & Du Gay, 2012:87). Bureaucracy is represented as so thoroughly antiquated “that to invoke its name is to be labeled at best nostalgic, and at worst, irrelevant” (ibid.). However, as shown in this thesis on local government, and in the broader field of public sector research by Olsen (2006), Goodsell (2005), Parker & Bradley (2004), and Peters (2003), the values and practices of bureaucracy appear less untimely and as relevant today as ever before. The values and practices of bureaucracy are somewhat disguised—like a Trojan horse—however, in concepts such as social investment, implying innovation, flexibility and transformation.

Forsell and Ivarsson-Westerberg (2014) see a similar trend of “bureaucratization” of public sector organization, but describe it from a rather different perspective. They discuss how the administrative work of public sector employees increases at the expense of their “real” tasks. More attention than before is now given to documentation, planning and evaluation, for instance—activities closely related to the project logic. Their argument is that civil servants like teachers, social workers or public health strategists to an increasing extent work more on administration and less on teaching, social work and public health related activities. As argued above, a parallel bureaucracy is created, or a bureaucracy within the bureaucracy.

The involvement in specific projects may include an increasing administrative workload. To use the project model or project methodology in ordinary work means to manage your daily activities—a management based on documentation, planning and evaluation, i.e., administrative procedures. A fitting description of this is captured by Hall (2012), who calls them *management bureaucrats*: civil servants engaged to an increasing extent in the practices of administration and management.

Clearly what we witness when studying public sector projectification is not the end of bureaucracy, but perhaps what Clegg (2012) describes as post-bureaucratic possibilities “that have had the effect of undermining some distinctions previously deemed incontestable: e.g., market vs. hierarchy; centralization vs. decentralization; public vs. private sectors” (p. 69).

## A common language

Language also connects the different conceptualizations of projectification, and encourages the increasing use of the project logic. When organizing a “separate” EU-funded project, or applying for an internal social investment project, or even organizing your day-to-day activities in accordance with a project model, the language of the project is there: in the applications, in the project plans, in the presentations, and to some extent perhaps even in the day-to-day conversations between colleagues.

Several of the interviewees in Eslöv talked about the importance of a common language to understand each other across departments, to facilitate learning, and to enhance the ability to work consistently. Much as the occupation of the project manager has been described as a *jack of all trades*, his/her language is also designed to handle all trades and be “empty” when it comes to content, but more “full” when it comes to form or function. For example, project language consists of descriptions of actors associated with projects, such as project managers, project team, steering groups, owners and stakeholders. These descriptions are not assigned to any particular policy area or organizational field, but are intended to be applicable to all. The same goes for the description of possible actions, in which we in Eslöv saw the use of “impact objectives” and “deliverables” in projects, as well as in the descriptions in ordinary budgets: project language can be used everywhere. Project language is taught in project management courses and diffused via project policies and the project model. It is also encouraged in order to receive funds—when applying for a project, your idea is to be described using project language.

The idea of a common language was evident when it came to social investment practices in Eslöv. Several civil servants at different levels of the organization, and even politicians, described the necessity of a common language. This, however, might be difficult when collaborating with different departments populated with civil servants with different backgrounds and from different professions. The promoters of the project model in Eslöv argued that the model is the answer to these difficulties. By using the project model and its project vocabulary, the language used in collaboration is not “tainted” by its association with any specific department. However, the use of a “new” language also entails processes of translation from the departments’ different languages into a common one. Even though project language does not replace the other languages used, the common language in these processes is not a language

directly related to social investment, sustainable social development or public health etc., but to projects. The common language is a language “empty” of content, and directs its user to the form or function of managing something while telling them nothing about what is being managed. A growing reliance on such language might have unexpected consequences for the organizations and employees. With a project language comes not only words and expressions but, as Rombach and Zapata (2010:7) argue, also ways of thinking, values and perspectives.

However, an “empty” language is also open to somewhat uncertain but potential future action. Åkestrøm Andersen and Pors (2016) describes a “potentiality administration” in which contemporary public organizations do “not preach adaption to a specific scenario, but rather adaption to adaption ... [and in which] the world is described in indefinite terms” (p. 16). Such indefinite terms are provided by the project logic as manifested through project models and project methodology. What is happening, Åkestrøm Andersen and Pors argue, is an acceleration of the speed with which conceptions of the future replace one another. “Welfare managers are expected to be looking for what schooling, care, health, and so on may mean beyond the presently imaginable” (p. 23) and in terms of projectification they may do so while relying on the project logic to manage their actions.

It is difficult to assess the effects generated by the use of a specific language. But when civil servants become accustomed to, and start using, the language of the project, they may also be more susceptible to other project-logic-related practices:

- Temporality: regarding your employment, what you do and where the organization’s focus is.
- Visibility: in which what you do must be presented in an attractive manner to various audiences.
- Competition: between ideas and practices.
- Demands that your work ought to be innovative and collaborative.

## Projects as low-risk political and managerial endeavors

Initiating a local government project—whether internally or externally funded—appears to be a rather low-risk endeavor. On the one hand, employees and organizations engage in activities often intended to improve local government in some way. The projects often attract some attention from politicians and managers, as well as from other municipalities, and the project initiatives are also often perceived as actions taken by a proactive organization doing something to handle diverse and sometimes pressing societal problems. But, on the other hand, the activities, and sometimes also the jobs, are temporary and do not necessarily have to change anything (regarding the content of the organizations) in the long run. The organizations involved do not risk a great deal with the projects, and do not really commit to much, either, but stay through the project logic open to “potential future action” as Åkeström Andersen and Pors (2016) argues. This becomes evident when we look at social investment and issues of implementation and/or organizational learning: these issues are strikingly apparent and filled with unanswered questions in Eslöv, in the thematic group, in Norrköping and Örebro, and in the workings of the SKL as well. Projects are initiated, but implementation “failure” is all too common.

There is an eagerness to initiate projects—aided by the political logic as well as the market logic—but how to take care of the results coming from these projects, or how to learn from them within the ordinary operations are less interesting, or sometimes left to chance. The eagerness to initiate projects for change and transformation often comes from a political level and from national organizations such as the SKL (in the case of social investment), and is advocated for at conferences or via seminars and reports. These are actors who, somewhat distant from local government practices, influence and steer the day-to-day practices of civil servants. By putting political logic at center stage—and putting the bureaucratic logic backstage—at conferences or when initiating projects, focus is placed upon problems at hand and “best practices” for how to solve them. The best practices are also regarded as “readily” transferable between municipalities since they are “products” (of the project and political logics), and local government bureaucratic practices and needed organizational translations and adaptations are not really considered.

Even though the intentions with a social investment fund in many cases is to utilize the expertise and experiences of civil servants, the funds come across

as organizational experiments in which the initiatives are taken from a distance, and by actors without the responsibility for the processes of implementation.

Since many of the social investment projects are collaborative endeavors, the results from them are to be implemented in several different departments or organizations. But this was difficult and as one department head argued “it all comes down to who pays,” meaning that the bureaucratic logic had the upper hand, and it appeared easier to continue as before and leave the effects resulting from the project to the individuals involved. Despite the difficulties in implementing project results and making collaborations last beyond the life span of the projects, the creation of new projects seemed tempting.

Initiating a project is both rewarding—it shows decisiveness and action—and rather risk free—it adds resources, and is easy to discard. If the organization finds itself in a situation in which cutbacks or redundancies are needed, it seems fairly easy to discard or cancel a project, compared to canceling ordinary procedures: when the funding is up, the project is over.



# Concluding remarks

The aim of this study has been to conceptualize local government projectification by answering the questions of how it is manifested in practice, and what the consequences of the project logic are for local government organizations and their employees. In order to answer these questions, an institutional ethnography was conducted in the Swedish municipality of Eslöv and its surroundings. Through an institutional logic perspective informed by translation theory, and the analysis of my empirical material and earlier research on projects, projectification and public-sector reforms, I conceptualize local government projectification as three separate but interrelated phenomena: proliferation; transformation and adaptation; and organizational capacity building.

Projectification as proliferation emphasizes the increasing use and diffusion of projects and project ideas; projectification as transformation and adaptation highlights processes of transformation of “permanent” ordinary organizational activities to temporary projects, and processes of adaptation in the surrounding organizations and structures; and projectification as organizational capacity building in which the project logic is spread and diffused in local government organizations, not primarily through specific projects, but through practices encouraging the project logic, and how that reinforces local government’s organizational project capacity.

Based on the three conceptualizations of local government projectification, I draw three overarching conclusions.

First, *projectification should be regarded as something more than a lot of projects*. Even though we may observe an increasing use of clearly defined and demarcated projects, due to the way in which they are diffused between organizations and impact their surroundings, processes of projectification are more far reaching. However, to conceptualize those consequences as something related to projects, we should look for the project logic rather than specific projects. This allows us to understand the increasing employment of project managers, the use of project management vocabulary and the development of project courses and project models in local government as part of the same

phenomenon—the increasing use and diffusion of the project logic. This broader understanding of projectification (see Packendorff & Lindgren, 2014) might also have vast consequences for local government organizations and their employees. Whereas the clearly defined and demarcated projects often are criticized for not having the intended effects, consequences coming from the project logic are more widespread, and go relatively un-noticed. When acting upon the project logic (outside the clearly defined projects), the organizations not only take on the thought after flexible and innovative characteristics; with the “project-logic-package” they also get impermanence, competition and visibility: impermanence regarding jobs, activities and/or organizational focus for instance; competition between civil servants and between organizational solutions not only for attention (visibility), but also for funding, and through that, for organizational focus.

Second, *projects are not “just” vehicles carrying something forward, but techniques, tools and practices that produce specific effects of their own, independently of their stated objectives or aims ascribed to them.* Social investment or social innovation, total quality management, collaboration or any other organizational “solution” sweeping across the public sector implicitly encourage organizations to build project capacity and organize in project form. These solutions are temporary. They come and go, but when they come, they often do so, to some extent, through project funding. No matter what consequences these solutions have regarding how public organizations collaborate, make early investments in people’s lives, or how innovative the social services become, the odds are great that the organizations also will become somewhat projectified.

Third, *the practical outcome of the project logic is far more related to the rational and technical aspects of projects as form than the innovative, flexible aspects of project as process.* The flexible, empowering and innovative aspects of projects are important when launching and presenting a project, then those aspects are associated with the content of the projects—social innovation ideas, social investment ideas or collaborative ideas—not with the project form. A politician or manager might argue for taking action against a specific problem with an innovative social investment idea, but when that idea translates into practice, the more technocratic planning, execution and reporting tools take over. As argued above, the projects produce specific effects, independent of their stated objectives (the aims ascribed to them), and here I further that argument to say that the effects they produce are strongly associated with bureaucratic logic. One might, as such, expect local governments that strongly encourage the



application of the project logic to also show strong tendencies toward bureaucratization.

Since the research field of public sector projectification is still developing, and my thesis is but a small piece in a much larger puzzle, there is of course more research to be done. Based on my study, I think that some of the more uncharted territory within the field is that related to “agents of projectification”—who, or what, is explicitly and/or implicitly reinforcing projectification? In my work, I found the role of consultants, as well as regional collaborative public organizations to be of great importance. However, these agents do not always explicitly advocate the project logic, but rather the opposite. They promote a specific concept or organizational solution or perhaps more funding—not projects. As these agents—in terms of projectification—are somewhat “concealed,” we also know relatively little about who they are in different settings, and how they operate.

I also believe that more research is needed when it comes to consequences and the effects of the increasing reliance on the project logic in different settings. That research, however, cannot focus or rely on the study of specific project organizations/initiatives as those tells us just half the story. Instead research have to trace activities, actors and practices elsewhere using the characteristics of the project logic as guide.

In a broader perspective, and taken together, these issues also raise wider questions of organizational, institutional and political power and democratic accountability.



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# Appendix

| <b>Interviews</b>   | <b>Quantity</b> |
|---|-----------------|
| Politician (chairwoman of Eslöv City Council)   | 1               |
| Civil servants in Eslöv   | 24              |
| Civil servants in other municipalities  | 18              |
| Civil servants at regional or national level  | 8               |
| Consultant  | 1               |
| <b>Field notes from:</b>  |                 |
| Observations of, and/or participating in meetings with thematic group between 2014-2017 | 15-20           |
| Fieldtrip to Norrköping October 2014  | 1 day           |
| Fieldtrip to Örebro October 2016  | 1 day           |
| Conferences, organized by SKL in Stockholm Oct. 2016                                    | 1 day           |
| Conferences, organized by the thematic group, in Tomelilla May, 2014.                   | 1 day           |
| Conference, organized by Platform for Social Innovation Nov. 2015.                      | 1 day           |
| Conference, organized by Institute for sustainable Urban Development, Oct. 2015.        | 1 day           |
| Seminar, organized by KEFU, Lund April 2015   | 1               |
| Seminar, organized by Platform for Social Innovation Jan. 2016.                         | 1               |

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## Projectification | The Trojan horse of local government

When a public sector organization launches a project intended to tackle issues such as unemployment or gender equality, positive effects on employment rates or improvements in gender equality are expected. However, consequences generated by the organizational form or the logic of the project, such as impermanence, competition, organizational adaption, and mobilization of project capacity, are seldom explicitly stated, intended, or even recognized. These “concealed” consequences of project activities are what Mats Fred refers to in the title as a Trojan horse.

The thesis is an institutional ethnography, starting in the Swedish municipality of Eslöv, in which an institutional logic perspective is used in combination with translation theory to conceptualize local government projectification. Three separate but interrelated conceptualizations are presented. Projectification as proliferation emphasizes the increasing use and diffusion of projects and project ideas. Projectification as transformation and adaptation highlights processes where traditional bureaucratic procedures are transformed into temporary organizations. Projectification as organizational capacity building implies that the project logic diffuses in local government not mainly through specific projects, but through practices encouraging the project logic, which reinforces the organizational project capacity.

Mats Fred argues that the practical outcome of the project logic is also more related to the rational and technical aspects of the project as a form than the innovative and flexible aspects of the project as a process. Hence, local government bureaucracy appears to be battle bureaucracy with more bureaucracy.



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